

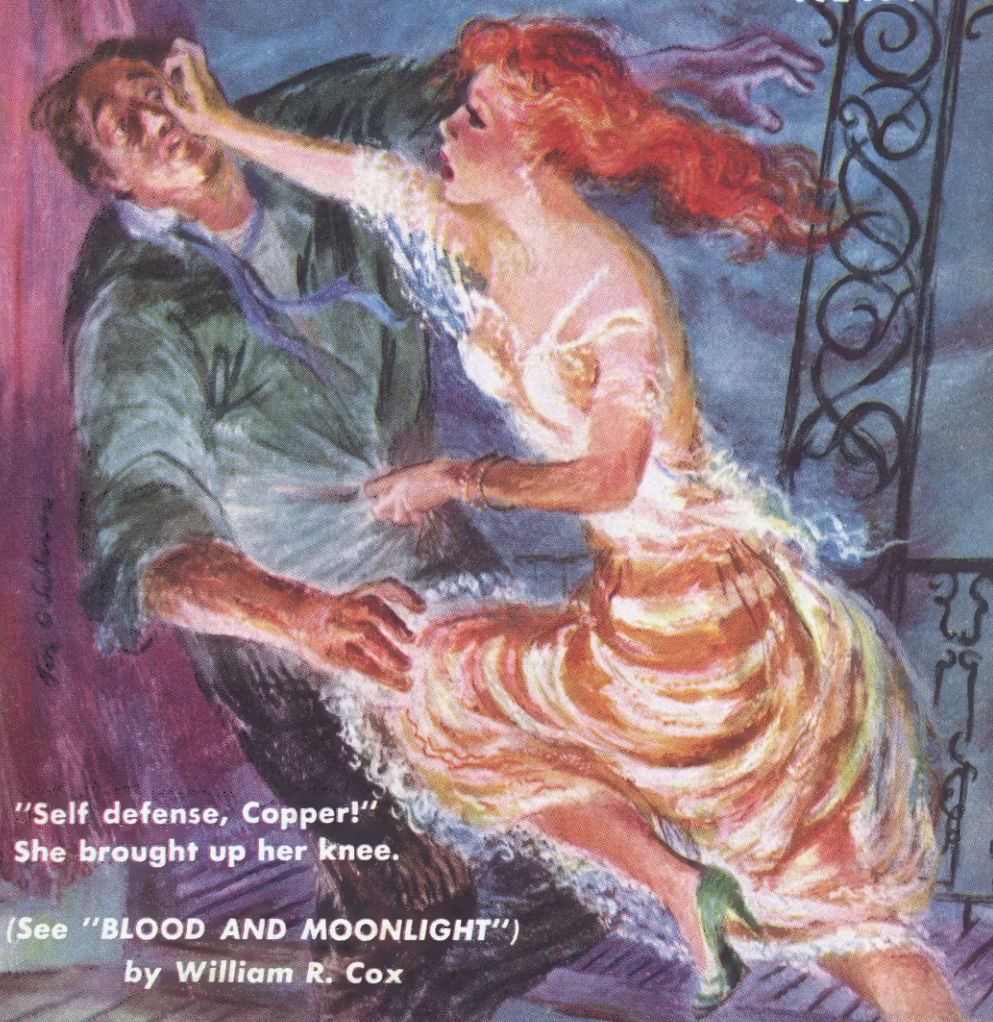
MANHUNT

WORLD'S BEST SELLING CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1956

35 CENTS

EVERY STORY
NEW!



"Self defense, Copper!"
She brought up her knee.

(See "BLOOD AND MOONLIGHT")

by William R. Cox

Also — WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT • DAVID ALEXANDER
HARRY WHITTINGTON • GIL BREWER • NORMAN STRUBER

Cover by Tom O'Sullivan

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

DEADLY BELOVED by William Campbell Gault.....	57
---	----

SHORT STORIES

THE ENORMOUS GRAVE by Norman Struber.....	I
RUN FROM THE SNAKES! by David Alexander.....	11
BLOOD AND MOONLIGHT by William R. Cox.....	27
RING THE BELL ONCE by Paul Eiden.....	38
MATINEE by Gil Brewer.....	47
LESSON IN MURDER by Wally Hunter.....	89
THE LOVERS by John Godey.....	94
NIGHT OF CRISIS by Harry Whittington.....	101
BODY IN THE RAIN by John S. Hill.....	117
DANGEROUS MONEY by F. J. Smith.....	122
BUS TO PORTLAND by L. W. King.....	129
CHICKEN! by Phil Perlmutter.....	138

MICHAEL ST. JOHN, Publisher

R. E. DECKER, General Manager

WALTER R. SCHMIDT, Editorial Director

WILLIAM MANNERS, Managing Editor

CHARLES W. ADAMS, Art Director

N. F. KING, Associate Editor

GERALD ADAMS, Assistant Art Director

JOE SHORE, Advertising Rep.

MANHUNT VOLUME 4, NUMBER 10, October, 1956. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1956 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

The Enormous Grave

As a murder victim, he was a natural. So it seemed to Anne.

BY NORMAN STRUBER



KILLING Donald Morse was as easy as he had expected it to be.

With the ends of the nylon rope twisted around his fists, he'd simply stepped up behind Donald, slipped the length of rope over his head and back against his windpipe. He pulled Donald toward him and held him like that until he'd ceased

struggling. It was all over in little more than a minute.

He released Donald now and let him crumple limply to the floor. For a moment he stood there looking down at the body, unwrapping the rope from his hands, folding it neatly and slipping it back into the inside pocket of his dinner

jacket. At the same time he removed the grey suede gloves which were in that pocket. Stooping, he reached for the languid wrist and felt for a pulse beat. There was none. He straightened up and put the gloves on and let the air escape from his lungs in a long, quiet sigh. "It's done," he said softly.

The woman did not answer. She stood by the piano, her full mouth trembling, a handkerchief being twisted tightly in nervous fingers. She was an attractive woman in her mid-thirties, blonde, in a hostess gown that molded the pleasing curves of her body.

She stood there rigidly, and then she turned abruptly, knees wobbling as she stumbled forward a few steps and leaned against the piano for support. He walked up behind her quickly and gripped her shoulders gently but firmly. "Let's keep our heads about this, Anne," he said with grave concern. "Quickly now, put the lights on in the basement for me."

She sucked in a deep breath and turned slowly in his arms, glancing over the lifeless body of her husband and shuddering a little. She nodded and slipped from his arms and was about to leave when he reached out and caught her elbow suddenly. "Wait!" he said alarmed, holding a finger to his lips and saying, "Shh!" before she could speak. She stood stiff and motionless and followed his eyes to where they were staring at the picture window

drapes just opposite them.

They were open a few inches.

He moved across the room rapidly, slipping behind a second set of drapes and opening the glass door onto the terrace. He looked around in the darkness outside and listened for sounds for awhile, then satisfied there was nobody out there he came back inside. "I thought I heard something," he said taking a handkerchief and dabbing his brow. "It must be my imagination. I didn't think I was this jumpy."

"You...you're sure there's no one?" she said, her blue eyes worried.

He frowned pensively, closing the window drapes all the way. "The only other person who would have any business here at this hour is the housekeeper."

"Frieda? But it couldn't have been her, Howard. I told you I sent her on a vacation yesterday. She'll be gone a week."

He sighed with relief, nodded. "Just nerves. But somehow I just don't trust that witch. It's always been beyond me how you can stand having her around." He left the drapes and came toward her with an urgent expression on his round face.

"Frieda's been with me for years, Howard. I've always trusted her. She wouldn't..."

"Come on, Anne, let's not waste any more time!"

As Anne left the room, he took his handkerchief and wiped off

everything he'd touched that evening, prior to the time he began wearing the gloves.

Donald Morse had easily been as tall and heavy as he, but he finally managed to drag the body from the living room to the basement, then past the wine press and the wooden barrels and the filters and the rest of the paraphernalia Donald had used to manufacture his home-made wines. Anne was waiting for him near the large earth pit, where the bottles of choice stock were buried for cool storage. He dragged the body to the edge of the pit, then paused when he saw Anne trembling. "You all right, darling?" he said concerned.

Her blonde head moved up and down in a brisk, stiff nod. "I...I think I can use a drink, Howard."

"Of course." He went over to the wooden storage rack, found a full bottle of brandy and a dusty glass with a trace of wine caked on the bottom. He broke the seal on the bottle and pulled the cork. "Do you mind?" he asked showing her the glass before he poured.

She shook her head stiffly, "No."

He poured the brandy and handed it to her quavering fingers and watched her down it swiftly. Then he took the glass and poured a hefty one for himself, smiling as Anne's nervous blue eyes looked up at him. "To our future, Anne," he toasted. "It will be a happy one, now." He tipped the glass to his lips and drained it.

Her eyes flicked to the body at the edge of the pit, then darted back to his face again. He set the bottle and glass down and took her in his arms. He said consolingly, "He felt little pain, Anne. When my time comes, I hope I can die with as little suffering."

The blue eyes flashed up at him, frightened. "Please don't talk like that, Howard! If...if we're caught..."

He held her tightly. "Easy now. Easy, darling. We're not going to get caught."

Her soft body trembled against him. "Oh God, Howard, I..."

Taking her face caressingly in his gloved hands he bent and kissed her. "I love you, Anne. Will you remember that?"

"I...I love you, too." She opened her eyes and looked at him. "I love you so very much, Howard. If only Donald..."

"Donald was the one wall between us, darling." He glanced over at the dead man. "I'm sure he knew you didn't love him. That's why he was so miserable. He's much better off this way." His eyes shifted back to her and he held her shoulders assuringly "We'd better get on with the rest of it."

He released her and climbed down the steel ladder into the pit, to the dirt level three feet below the concrete floor. Picking up the shovel, he began digging hastily, thankful again for Donald's incredibly convenient hobby, which

simplified considerably the problem of disposing of the corpse.

Using the shovel carefully, he removed the bottles of wine as he came to them, digging to a depth of about five feet in the soft earth, and shaping the hole to Donald's size. Anne did not watch as he dumped the body into the pit and buried it, replacing the bottles at the same depth they were buried previously, about two feet over the dead man. Finally, he looked about carefully; he wanted it to appear as though the last person to have dug there had been Donald.

On the way upstairs he told Anne, "Make sure you wax the floors and vacuum the rugs in the morning. When the police begin snooping around here we don't want them to find any evidence of a body having been dragged through the house."

"Do you have Donald's airline ticket?" he asked looking at Anne.

She nodded, hands clasped tightly at her waist.

"Fine. Get it while I go upstairs and change." He left her and went up to Donald's bedroom, changing his tie, shoes, and suit for those of Donald's and packing his own clothes along with some more of the dead man's into a suitcase initialed D. M. Then he took the thick moustache he'd removed from his pocket before he'd changed clothes, went before the bureau mirror and glued the moustache over his lip. He stood there for a few

moments adjusting it, until the mirror reflected a fairly decent semblance of Donald Morse.

Anne was waiting at the foot of the stairs, visibly startled by the amazing likeness as he came down to her.

He grinned. "How do I look, darling?"

The blue eyes faltered. "Like... like Donald."

"Good. Now, let's have the ticket." She handed it to him and he said, "I'll call you collect from Chicago. That way you and the phone company will have a record of Donald's call. I won't go to Donald's business meeting, of course, but there'll be enough evidence without that to prove he arrived in Chicago."

"When will I see you again?" she asked worriedly.

"I'll be on a plane back to New York tomorrow morning. I'll call again as soon as I get back to my apartment. It'll be a social call, and make sure you don't say anything that could sound suspicious."

"But when will I see you?" she insisted.

"Not until the end of the week, when you notify the police about Donald's disappearance. After all, we don't want to take any chances, do we? When the police have begun the investigation, I'll come to see you... as a naturally concerned friend of the family."

"I... I'm terribly worried, Howard."

He went over and put his arms around her, squeezed her gently. "Don't be, darling," he said soothingly. "Everything's going to be fine. I'd never have gone through with it if I hadn't thought the plan would work."

"I wish I could be as sure of myself as you are. I..."

He stopped her mouth effectively with a kiss. "Don't even think about Donald or the police," he told her. "Just think about us, Anne. Only us."

Her eyes lifted and looked up at him and she smiled a little for the first time that evening. "All right, Howard. I... I suppose I am being silly. This... this is the way it has to be. We decided that a long time ago.

"Good girl." He took Donald Morse's hat and coat out of the hall closet, exchanged his gloves for those in the coat pocket, then put his own hat, coat, and gloves in the suitcase with the other clothes. Go to the door he said, "I'll leave Donald's car at the airport, the way he always does." He reached for the doorknob. "As far as the police or anyone else is concerned. I wasn't even here tonight. You look around the house and make sure of that."

"I only hope you weren't seen walking here from the station."

He shook his head, smiling. "I wasn't." His eyes locked with hers for a moment. "You'll be all right, won't you, Anne?"

She nodded, pulling her lips

taut. "Yes. I'll think about later... and you and me... and I'll be fine."

Minutes later Howard was driving along Northern State Parkway in Donald's DeSoto, westbound for New York International Airport. Without mishap, he pulled into the airport parking lot, left the car there, checked in at the airlines counter, and calmly stepped onto the Chicago-bound plane. Three hours later he arrived in Chicago without anything having occurred to arouse any of the passengers' suspicions. In the terminal building he stepped into a public phone booth and called Anne in Long Island, telling the long distance operator that he was calling his wife, Mrs. Donald Morse, collect. In a few minutes he heard Anne accept the call on the other end of the line.

"Donald?" Anne said anxiously.

"Yes, Anne. I arrived a little while ago. Everything's fine."

"Oh... oh, good, dear. Then you had a pleasant trip?"

"Just fine. I'll see you in a few days, Anne."

"All right, Donald. Take good care of yourself."

"I will. You, too, darling. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Donald."

Much as Howard wanted to, he did not use Donald's hotel reservation, because of the risk involved in registering. Though he'd practiced the dead man's handwriting for several days, he did not feel

certain enough about a perfect duplication of the signature. Rather than risk everything on a single detail, he decided there was enough evidence with the airlines, including the physical description the ticket agent and hostess could give the police, to firmly establish that Donald had arrived in Chicago, alive.

He took a cab to a cheap hotel. There was an incinerator chute, in the hall across from his room, and he dumped the disguise and all of Donald's clothes down it. In the morning he caught a plane back to New York, travelling under an assumed name.

The phone was ringing urgently as he opened the door to this apartment. He stared at the receiver before, finally, picking it up. "Hello?"

"Howard?" It was Anne's excited voice.

"Anne, you shouldn't have..."

"I had to! Somebody saw..."

"Don't say another word!"

"Please, Howard, you must come over right away."

"Damn it, Anne! I told you not to..."

"Howard, I have to see you! It's terribly important!"

"All right, I'll meet you in an hour. You know where."

"Yes. Yes, I'll be waiting, Howard."

He hung up and left the apartment, taking his car from the basement garage. Anne was waiting for

him in the small bar on Northern Boulevard when he got there. He whisked her to a booth in the rear.

"My God, Howard!" she began, trembling.

He reached across the table and took her hands in his. "Calm down, Anne," he whispered urgently. "Please, get hold of yourself." She held her breath and sat there rigidly, watching him with despairing eyes as he ordered two martinis, waiting with nervous impatience until the waiter had brought the drinks and left.

"Now, what's it all about?" he asked.

With quivering hands she opened her pocketbook, took out a posted envelope and handed it to him. She watched him and said nothing as he slid the note out of the envelope and read the roughly penciled letters:

High class people should close their drapes at night. Specially when there killing a guy. Believe it or not lady I was going to rob your house last night. Then I saw you and that guy with the rope. Why the other guy was killed I don't care lady believe me. Only I figure there must have been a good reason and if you want me to keep my mouth shut I got to have a good reason too. Seein your house you can afford plenty. But I ain't greedy so I'll take fifty thousand dollars and I'll be dead as far as your concerned. Send the money with your friend. He throws it out of his car

on the corner of Cove Rd and Northern Blvd 11 tinght. Put the money in a paper bag. Just in case you think I'm fooling I ain't.

Tight-lipped, Howard crushed the note in his fist, grabbed his martini and downed it in one gulp.

"There . . . there *was* someone out there last night," Anne said, her voice hoarse, weak.

He nodded, taking a deep breath and examining the envelope. It had been mailed Special Delivery that same day, from a town near the Morse residence. "Our blackmailer didn't waste any time, did he?" he said angrily, stuffing the note and envelope into his pocket. "I'm worried. He seems stupid, almost illiterate. He didn't even have the sense to give us a reasonable amount of time to get the money. A man without patience is dangerous."

Anne shook her head hopelessly. "Is there anything we can do, Howard?"

Tiredly, he squeezed the tips of his fingers to the corners of his eyes. "I'm not sure, Anne. I'm not sure, at all. I only know I should have looked around the terrace more carefully last night. He was probably hiding in the shadows all the while."

"I can get the fifty-thousand easily enough, Howard. You know that. But do you think it will do any good?"

He looked at her, nodding dejectedly. "I know what you mean. If we pay this time, what's to stop

him from coming back for more?"

"No. I meant how can we be sure he'll keep his word and not go to the police."

"The idea of blackmail, Anne, is to make money. Lots of it. I'm sure he'll keep his mouth shut as long as we pay him."

"Then we should pay him. It's worth it."

"I don't think you understand, Anne. He'll be back sure as the devil, as soon as he has used up the fifty-thousand."

She reached out for his hand, the blue eyes serious. "I don't care, Howard. With Donald gone, I'll soon have plenty. Enough to keep ourselves and our blackmailer happy for a long time."

He sat silent for a few moments, pensively toying with the martini glass. "I don't know. I hadn't figured on anything like this."

"I know, Howard. It's the only way. I . . . I don't feel like dying in the electric chair, either."

His eyes looked at her face sincerely. "Nothing's going to happen to you, darling. If it ever came to being caught by the police, I'd confess and completely absolve you. After all, I was the one who actually . . ."

"Stop it, Howard! Don't talk like that. We're in this together. We have been from the very first." She drew in a breath, straightened, and picked up her martini. She took a sip, then looked up and met his solemn eyes. "I'll get the money

this afternoon," she said decisively.

"No," he told her. "You can't do that. The police will undoubtedly check your banks after you report Donald missing. They'd be suspicious if there were any withdrawals now."

"But can they prove anything?"

"We can't afford to give them the chance to try. No. I have a better idea. I'll get the money. Fifty-thousand just about covers every nickel I have, but..."

"I can't let you do that, Howard."

"It can't be done any other way. Besides, we're in this together, darling. You said so yourself."

She set the drink down and caressed his hand. "Howard, darling, I..."

He fastened his eyes on hers. "You understand, though, this won't be the end. That I can guarantee. You'll probably have to take care of any future demands."

She squeezed his hand, smiling a little. "With all that's coming to me, Howard, I'll be able to return your money as well."

"Thank you, darling. But that isn't the important thing." He sat there looking at her for a long moment, appreciatively. "I'll have to leave now," he said with seemingly renewed spirits. "I'd better get started if I'm to get the money in time."

"Will you be able to come over, Howard? Before?"

"I'd better not. I'll call you when it's all over."

She sighed heavily. "All right, darling."

Howard left immediately and drove to Manhattan, where he spent the rest of the day. Eight o'clock that evening the phone shrilled as he was coming out of the shower. He stood there staring at the phone while it continued to ring, debating with himself whether or not he should answer. When the ringing persisted after a full minute, he lifted the receiver. Anne didn't even give him a chance to say hello.

"Howard! Howard! Something horrible has happened! Come quickly!"

"For God's sake, Anne, what...?"

"I can't tell you over the phone! Please hurry!"

"But..."

"PLEASE!!"

"I..." She hung up and he wondered if she'd fainted.

Luckily, he had the paper bag all ready for the rendezvous. He finished dressing, grabbed the bag and caught a cab downstairs. Twice more he changed cabs before he finally stepped onto the Morse driveway. Anne was already at the door as he strode to the steps, her face a mask of fright.

The bag clutched in his hands, he ran up the steps. "Anne! What is it? What happened?"

"Down . . . downstairs . . . the basement," she stammered.

"What, Anne? What's downstairs?"

She whirled and beckoned him to follow as she opened the basement door and started down the steps. "Oh God, Howard," she said breathlessly. "It . . . it's Donald."

"Donald?" He dashed through the doorway and followed her down, bumping into the wine press and stumbling hurriedly after her. Anne stopped a few feet from the pit, standing shakily, one hand at her forehead covering her eyes, her other arm extended and pointing erratically toward Donald's grave.

He stopped short then and looked at her for a moment, then moved slowly to the edge of the pit, eyes suddenly swimming dizzily, not knowing what to expect, his throat harshly dry, throbbing with panic.

He gaped into the pit.

There was nothing but a freshly dug hole. It was deep, its diameter about the length of Donald's body. But there was no corpse.

He stood there weakly, trying to regain his composure, wondering, trying to figure it all out. "Who . . . who could have . . .?"

His voice choked off in his throat at the shocking realization that the hole he was staring at was not the same as the one he'd dug previously. It was different . . . a little more to the right . . . a little deeper. And the bottles of wine had been laid carefully beside it, as if whoever had been digging might have had in mind something similar to his own actions the previous night. Bewildered, he began to turn

slowly, refusing to believe the thought that came to his mind. It just didn't make sense. He turned, not wanting to believe, but the sight of Anne's suddenly hardened features, her beastly cold eyes, and the small automatic cocked in her fist, made him believe. It didn't make sense, but it was real.

He stared at her open-mouthed, fumbling for words, his face twitching with puzzlement.

"Save your breath, Howard," she said. "It's all very simple. Donald was broke." She grinned as his eyebrows jerked up. "Yes, the fool lost everything, including his job. Even the house is mortgaged to the hilt."

He became conscious then of the bag of money still gripped tightly in his fist. "But . . . but the business meeting in Chi . . ."

"Oh, that was just an interview for a job. Donald was ashamed to tell anyone he'd been fired. *That's* why he was miserable. Not because he knew I didn't love him."

"I . . . I can't believe . . ."

"Why, Donald was through years ago — after he had his first heart attack. I'd have left him then, but there was always the problem of money. And coming along as you did, Howard, you solved the problem for me neatly."

He stared at the gun, trembling now. "Anne, I . . . I still . . ."

"I fixed the drapes, as you remember, but I left them open a little, on purpose."

"But the noise outside. I . . . I was

sure I heard something."

She turned her head a little, her eyes glued to him, the gun unwavering. "Frieda," she called.

The housekeeper stepped out of the shadows then, a massive woman dressed in black, her sleeves rolled over her thick forearms, Donald's shovel in her hand. A ghoulisish smile was twisted across her face.

"Frieda..." he mumbled, "but you said she..."

Anne laughed.

"She... she wrote the note. She... You won't get away with it, Anne! You'll never...!"

"You don't think *your* stupid plan would have worked, do you? It would only have been a matter of time before the police began

digging down here. But it doesn't matter now. Frieda and I will be a long way from here by the time the police find you two." She raised the gun to her eye level. "I'll try to make it as painless as possible, Howard. The way you did for Donald."

He dropped the bag, hands outstretched, sweat pouring over his face. "Anne, I beg of you! Please, don't...don't...!"

She fired in rapid succession, emptying the clip into his face as he stumbled backward clutching wildly at the air. He toppled into the pit and Frieda's hulking frame moved forward slowly, the shovel in her hand, climbing down the ladder to complete the ceremony.



Courtesy for Cops

In Tokyo, Sadakichi Kato confessed to a crime and spent nearly two years in prison. Then evidence was found that proved Kato's innocence. Asked why he made his false confession, Kato explained that he didn't want to "embarrass" the police.

Malicious Mischief

Police in Ponca City, Okla., were called to investigate a fight in a residence on complaint of a neighbor. Investigating officers in their report wrote: "Nothing serious. Man was just trying to put his two kids to bed."

Fright and Flight

A would-be bandit entered a confectionery store in Dayton, O. and announced a stickup. Proprietor Nick Varvalides, frightened, ran out the back of the store. The empty-handed bandit, equally frightened, dashed out the front door.

Run from the Snakes!

By
**DAVID
ALEXANDER**

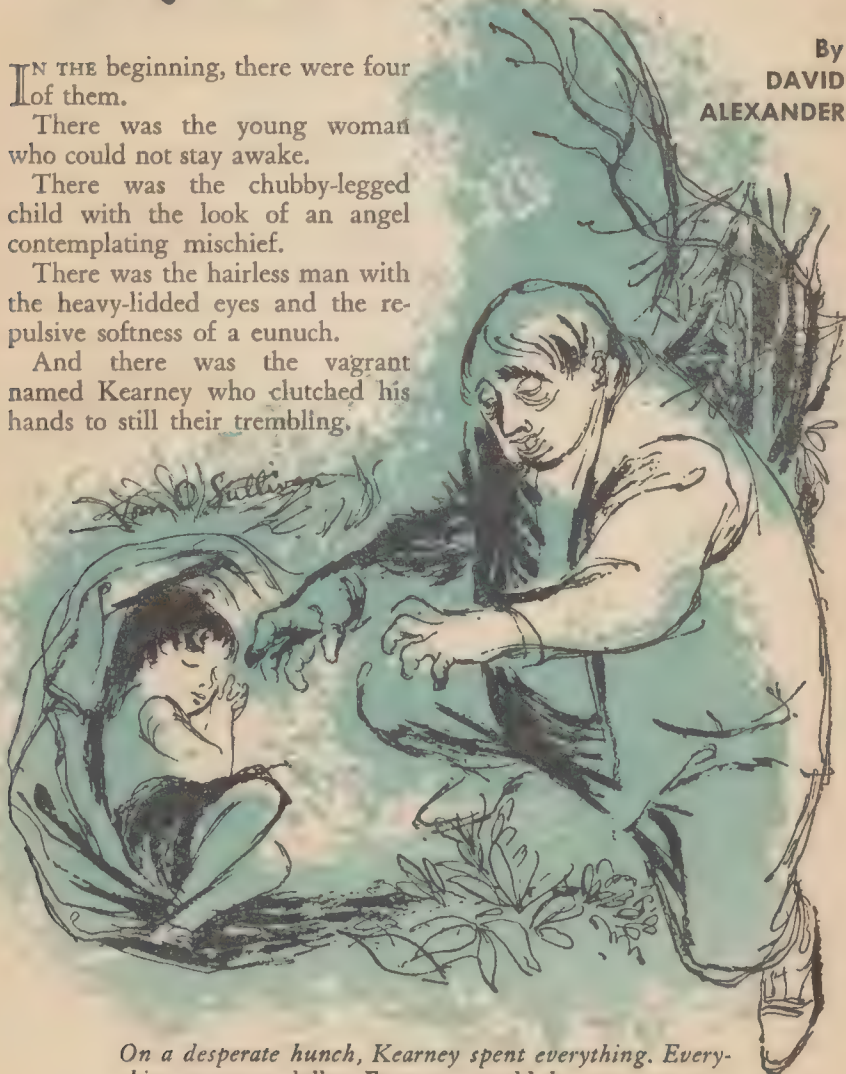
IN THE beginning, there were four of them.

There was the young woman who could not stay awake.

There was the chubby-legged child with the look of an angel contemplating mischief.

There was the hairless man with the heavy-lidded eyes and the repulsive softness of a eunuch.

And there was the vagrant named Kearney who clutched his hands to still their trembling.



On a desperate hunch, Kearney spent everything. Everything was one dollar. Few men could have spent more.

They were sitting on benches in Washington Square Park, near the little circle where the ice cream cart stands, where the heavy green busses pause before they make the turn and head through the arch on their uptown trip.

It was March and the afternoon sun was still pale with winter, but the warmth of spring was in it today.

The sleepy young woman and the hairless man sat on opposite ends of a bench. The chubby-legged child played with a rubber ball in front of the bench. Just across the cement walk the vagrant sat alone, clutching his hands and breathing heavily.

It was so hard for the woman to stay awake. The new warmth of the sun was positively insidious. It lulled her senses, made her want to surrender completely to the sleepy spell that was beginning. She could feel the little ache, the ache that was not at all unpleasant, in her joints. It was a warming kind of ache that began at her hips and flowed like liquid down her legs and into her feet and numbed her. The sleepy spells were becoming more frequent lately. She had several of them a day. But the doctor had said there was nothing to worry about. It was a blood sugar condition and it could be controlled by diet. It hadn't reached the stage of diabetes. Her blood sugar, the tests had shown, was about 125, what the doctor called high nor-

mal. She had an appointment with the doctor at three to get the result of the glucose tolerance tests. He would recommend her diet, then, and certain medication to prevent the sleepy spells that were bothering her. It was a sickness, she supposed, but it was a rather pleasant sickness, really. She was so drowsy now. Her appointment wasn't until three. She could have just a teeny little nap there in the sun, she told herself. The child was quite safe. She would never think of running off. She was such a good child. And of course, the woman thought, I will only drop off for a moment or two.

She remembered the little pills in her purse. Dexedrine. The doctor had prescribed them as a temporary measure until the results of all the tests were in. They helped her to stay awake. But she needed water to take one. The fountain was a long way off and she had no cup. She let her eyelids flutter together. It was so warm, so pleasant. It was spring at last.

The child had become fascinated with the gaily striped parasol of the nearby ice cream cart. She let her ball roll away a few feet on the sidewalk. She stood in front of her mother and spoke squeakily, with a rising inflection. "S'cream?" she said.

The mother was almost asleep, but she roused herself slightly. "No, dear," she said. "No ice cream. You've just finished your lunch,

don't you remember?"

The soft, smooth man at the other end of the bench was watching the child out of the corners of his heavy-lidded eyes. A little smile trembled on his fat, moist lips. A light breeze came up and blew a dirty fragment of newspaper past his feet. The headlines on the newspaper were big and black.

SEX KILLER STILL AT LARGE ANOTHER CHILD MISSING

The vagrant named Kearney was also watching the child. She's about four, I guess, he thought. Just about the age Pat was when Vi packed up and took her back to her folks' place in Illinois. How long ago was that? Five years. Five years, hundreds of days, thousands of hours, millions of minutes, all of them full of skid row stinks and the vomit-taste of cheap sweet wine and canned heat and rubbing alky. All except the last twenty-seven hours, at least. Kearney didn't own a watch, but a bell in a nearby tower had just chimed one. He'd had his last drink the day before at ten o'clock in the morning. He had gulped sweet Lucy from a pint bottle in a Bowery alley and he had known, all at once, after five years, that he'd reached the crossroads. He had to quit it cold turkey, because there was no other way to quit, or he had to kill himself. At the time, it had not mattered much. Death and sobriety had appeared equally unattractive.

But he was young and big and

there was still a tiny core of vitality burning inside him despite the indignities he had administered to his body and his mind and whatever was left of his soul. He had chosen to make an attempt to live. He had gone to a place called Twelfth Step House that was operated by a bunch of fellows who had been drunks and had got themselves sober. They called themselves Alcoholics Anonymous. They'd told him there that the first twenty-four hours were the worst. If you could get by the first twenty-four hours, you were fairly safe. Anyway, the thing he'd feared most hadn't happened. He hadn't come down with the DTs, the rams. They said if you didn't get the snakes the first day, you weren't going to have them. Kearney didn't want the snakes. He had seen men with the snakes in the flophouses and the gutters. The wadded dollar bill in his pocket was his insurance against the snakes.

The snakes didn't hit you all of a sudden. They served warning first. They came on you gradually, like a fever. A fellow at the Twelfth Step House, a volunteer worker in good clothes and a clean white shirt, had understood his fear of the snakes. It was this fellow who had given him the crumpled dollar bill.

"It's fear that makes the snakes come on," the guy had said. "You're afraid you can't get the medicine to stop them if they start

and it drives you crazy and pretty soon you're screaming with the rams. I know. I've been through it. So put this buck in your pocket. Keep touching it to reassure yourself. If you feel the snakes start crawling, all you have to do is buy a pint of wine and drink it quick and it will kill them. If you aren't afraid of the snakes, you never get them. If you know you can kill them, you won't be afraid. So keep the buck and keep touching it. That way you'll never have the rams."

It had worked so far. Once or twice, Kearney had almost spent the buck. After ten hours, the shakes had become so unbearable he had thought the nails were coming out of his shoes. His eyes had dimmed and misted over and he had thought he was going blind. The fellows at the Twelfth Step place had poured black coffee down him, cup after scalding cup. They'd kept on pouring it down even after he'd started throwing up. Finally, one guy had got hold of a goof ball somewhere and slipped it to him. That had quieted him. Anyhow, he hadn't had the snakes yet and the buck was still in his pocket.

Kearney was clean. He'd had a bath and they'd given him fifteen cents for a shave at the barber college because his hand was shaking too much for him to shave himself. They'd given him clothes, too, nothing fancy, but clothes that were clean and mended. He had denim pants and a flannel shirt

and an army field jacket. He even had a felt hat that fit him pretty well.

Kearney wondered if the worst of it was really over. "Do it twenty-four hours at a time," they'd told him. "If you get by the first twenty-four hours, you're in." He was better, he supposed, though God knew he felt bad enough. The sweat was still clammy on his body, but it was no longer streaming out of every pore in big fat bubbles. He'd managed to sleep fitfully for a while on the bunk in the dormitory where the A.A. fellows had sent him. He'd even managed to sit through an A.A. meeting and listen to speakers tell how they'd licked alcohol and been sober ever since. And he'd eaten the soup and sandwiches at the Twelfth Step place. His fear of the snakes was diminishing, too, partly because of the reassuring dollar in his pocket. He'd known right along that the dollar couldn't keep the snakes away forever, but it would keep them away long enough for him to kill himself and that was all he asked.

But mainly he felt some faint glimmer of confidence because the first twenty-four hours had passed. He was on the second twenty-four now and maybe if he'd just sit here in the sun and think how much better he was getting, his hands would stop trembling and in a day or two he might find a job fixing television sets. That had been his racket before Vi had packed

up and taken the kid back to Illinois because she couldn't stand his drinking. His eyes had cleared, too. The world about him, even the distant, jagged skyline, was startlingly lucid in the bright spring air. He couldn't remember seeing anything that clearly before, not in ages. Drunks walk around like blind men, he thought. They don't see anything that's more than a foot or two in front of them.

The character on the bench across the way was enough to give a man the rams, though. Kearney tried to concentrate his attention on the chubby kid who looked like an angel contemplating mischief, but his eyes kept going back to the man at the end of the bench. He thought of old Juan, the skid row drifter they had called the Mexican Hairless. Old Juan had been smooth and soft and womanish like that. The dirty piece of newspaper had fluttered to Kearney's side of the walk. Kearney read the words "Sex Killer" and thought, Jesus, he looks the part all right.

The young woman had fallen sound asleep. Her eyes were closed and her head lolled over on her right shoulder. Her breath came through parted lips. The little girl stood in front of the woman, regarding her speculatively. Tentatively, softly, the child said, "'S' cream?"

The woman did not awaken.

Glancing back over her shoulder, the child walked slowly on her

chubby legs toward the end of the bench where the man with the heavy-lidded eyes was sitting. The child's rubber ball had landed at the man's feet.

As the child approached, the man leaned down and picked up the bright ball. He held it out enticingly. His moist, blubbery lips smiled at the child. He patted the soft curls of the child's hair.

"Don't run away from your mommy, dear," the soft man cooed. "Your mommy's taking a nap."

The child took the ball and bounced it over the wire wicket that marked the boundary of the path. She lifted first one chubby leg and then the other over the low wicket. The ball was rolling over the new grass toward the ice cream cart.

When the child stepped over the wicket, the hairless man rose, and Kearney's body tensed. The man did not follow the child onto the grass. He walked off at a tangent, approaching the ice cream cart on the curving path.

Kearney watched the man and the child. He wanted to call to the sleeping woman. Then he suddenly realized that he was no longer a man, that for five years he hadn't been a man. He was a vagrant, a skid row bum. He was a drunk, even if he had been sweating it out now for twenty-seven hours. If he approached the woman, she would be frightened at his rough appear-

ance. She might scream. Besides, the man had not approached the child, was not even looking in the child's direction.

Kearney watched the hairless man go to the ice cream cart. The white-suited vendor reached into a refrigerated container and fished out an orange-colored popsicle. The hairless man laid a coin on the ledge of the cart and took the ice. The child had bent over and picked up her ball. She bounced it toward the ice cream cart.

Now the man stepped over the low wicket border onto the grass. He was walking toward the child.

Kearney rose suddenly, his body rigid. He looked at the sleeping woman, took a step toward her. Then he saw the prim looking woman nearby staring at him. Kearney still risked speaking but his words were almost inaudible. "Miss," he said. "Please, miss."

The sleeping woman did not hear him.

The hairless man was handing the popsicle to the child.

They were some ten yards distant now.

A big bus was pulling up to the curb, unloading passengers.

Kearney wanted desperately to touch the sleeping woman's shoulder, to warn her. But the prim woman was still staring at him. To the woman he was a bum. If he touched the sleeping girl, the other woman would start yelling for the cops. Kearney was jittery. He'd

been running from cops for all of five years. So he didn't want to complicate his life, especially now, by making explanations to cops.

Besides, the man had been sitting on the same bench with the young woman. He looked too old to be the child's father, but he might be an uncle, or a grandfather, even. It wasn't any of Kearney's business.

Then he saw that the child had taken the hairless man's hand and that the two were walking toward the bus, which stood at the curb with its motor running. The child was licking the popsicle. Occasionally, she cast a glance back over her shoulder at the woman who was sleeping on the bench.

Kearney called to the sleeping woman again in a cracked voice, "Lady, please, lady, wake up!"

But the woman did not awaken.

The man and the child were getting into the bus.

The bus starter was looking around, waving his hand at the driver to move off.

Kearney began to run.

The bus doors slammed in his face, and the bus lunged tremulously forward, but Kearney ran alongside, beating against the door with his fist.

The bus stopped and the doors opened.

The driver was surly. "Don't break the door down, bub," he growled. "This ain't the only bus that goes uptown, ya know."

Kearney clambered into the bus,

panting. Chasing the bus, forcing it to stop had been a mistake. He had attracted attention to himself. Kearney fumbled in his pocket and brought out the crumpled dollar bill. He parted with it hesitantly. He was spending his only insurance against the thing he feared most. The snakes. A day had passed, but the snakes could still come crawling. His hands were shaking so badly he could hardly get the fifteen cents into the slot. One of the quarters dropped to the floor. Kearney knelt down and picked up the quarter, cursing, sweat pouring out of him now, lathering his whole body. He tried to comfort himself as he reeled to the rear of the lurching bus. There was still enough change for a pint of wine, if the snakes started to crawl. If the snakes started crawling, he would just forget the kid and the hairless man. It wasn't any of his business, anyway. He was a plain damned fool. If the woman couldn't stay awake and watch her child, why on God's earth should he worry?

There were only two other persons on the bus besides the child and the hairless man and Kearney. One was a light-colored Negro boy who wore a beret and carried a large sketch portfolio. The other was a fat Italian woman with a flowery hat.

The hairless man had chosen a seat midway between the front and rear exits of the bus. He sat by the

window with the child on his lap. The child was still licking the popsicle greedily. She held her rubber ball in the hand that wasn't clutching the popsicle. The little girl appeared excited and happy. The popsicle had begun to melt and some of the orange goo spilled over the hairless man's coat, but he did not seem to mind.

As Kearney went up the aisle, the hairless man looked up curiously at him from under the lizard lids of his eyes.

Kearney took a seat across the aisle, back of the man and the child, directly opposite the rear exit.

He had the jitters bad now. He felt terribly confined by the bus. His teeth were rattling and he couldn't stop the sweating. He could smell himself and his sweat still had the sour odor of alcohol. Kearney cursed himself silently for what he had done. He had just begun to calm down and this sudden effort had caused him to suffer the worst sort of a relapse. He was dying for a drink now. I'll get off the bus, he told himself. I'll find the first liquor store and get a pint of sneaky and drink it down as fast as I can. I can't stand this.

Then he saw the man's hand stroking the child and there was something reptilian about the motion of the hand and arm that disgusted and infuriated Kearney. He decided to remain on the bus a little while, to sweat it out a few

minutes, anyway. Just long enough to catch my breath, he told himself.

A few passengers entered the bus at Eighth Street. At Fourteenth, an enormous crowd swarmed on and filled all the available seats. By Twenty-third the bus was crowded with standees and Kearney could not see the man and child across the aisle.

Another throng of passengers was waiting at Thirty-fourth.

Kearney got up from his seat, grabbed hold of a metal pole beside the rear exit. Standing, he could see the man and the child. If they got off the front, he would see them leave. If they exited at the rear, they would have to brush by him. The metal pole, to which Kearney was clinging for dear life as he tried to steady his shaking legs in the lurching bus, was slick and clammy in his sweaty palm. A well-dressed woman with a Lord and Taylor shopping bag was wedged against Kearney. The odor of his alcoholic sweat made her sniff disdainfully.

"The things you have to put up with on these buses," she said to her companion, glaring hard at Kearney.

The child had finished the popsicle. The man wiped the orange ice from the little girl's small mouth with a handkerchief. Then his hand began its reptilian, caressing motion again.

Out the window Kearney saw a sign, "Liquors."

The urge for a drink overwhelmed him again.

He released his grip on the pole and lurched toward the bellcord. He had to have the drink. The kid wasn't his business. He was going crazy in this crowded bus, sweltering in this heat of human beings. His stomach was turning over and he was afraid he would vomit.

But he didn't pull the bellcord. He almost fell into an old man's lap. The old man muttered something nasty about permitting drunks on public carriers.

The woman who didn't like his smell and the old man who didn't like the way he lurched about trying to keep his balance made Kearney angry, and that was what saved him. For a moment, he forgot the physical agony, the craving for a drink, and he was determined to see it through. He had no real plan, of course. He wouldn't have dared to approach a cop. No cop would believe a bum like him, a bum who was sweating booze at every pore. I'll just see where he's taking her, Kearney told himself. Then to hell with getting sober. I'll get as drunk as I can on what money's left.

At Fifty-ninth, the man carried the child toward the front door.

Kearney left the bus at the rear door.

The man carried the child across the street and entered a path that led into Central Park. Kearney followed.

What the hell can I do? Kearney asked himself bitterly as they entered the park. I'm clean but I'm still dressed like a bum. The other man might be repulsive, but he still looks respectable. That's the way the cops would look at it. They'd take the word of the guy who looks respectable. All I could tell them was that he bought some ice cream for the kid and brought her uptown on a bus while her mother was asleep, Kearney thought. He'd claim he was her uncle or grandfather or something and the cop would believe him and run me off and then I'd lose them entirely.

The man had put the child down after they had crossed the wide street. Now as they walked up the park path, the little girl skipped along happily beside him, her hand in his. Kearney tried to build up anger at the child who was the cause of all this trouble. What a dumb kid, he told himself. Why should I bother about a dumb kid who doesn't know enough not to go off with the first stranger who comes along? And what about her mother? That mother of hers must be some tramp to go to sleep and let her kid walk off with a stranger. It's not my business. I want a drink. I'll just see where they're going and then I'll get the drink and forget about them.

A smell that somehow reminded Kearney of his youth on a Kentucky farm assailed his nostrils. It was the heavy smell of stable dung.

They were approaching the zoo.

Kearney was getting sick again. The smell was making him sick. He saw a drinking fountain and staggered over to it. He let the water flow into his mouth for a long time. Then he splashed some of it over his sweaty face.

The man was buying the child a sack of popcorn.

They walked into the zoo. The man and the little girl were standing in front of a caged enclosure. There was a big, mangy-looking camel inside the enclosure. The smell of the beast was overpowering. Kearney was sure he was going to be sick. The water had come back into his throat and it tasted sour.

The man and the child walked to another cage and watched small deer romping. The child was clapping her hands and jumping up and down with delight.

Oh, Jesus, Kearney thought. I hope there's not a snake house. I couldn't stand a snake house. I been running from the snakes for almost twenty-eight hours now.

Kearney followed doggedly, but his legs were growing weak. They led him through the bird house and it seemed to Kearney that the great bright wings were beating inside his head, smashing against his throbbing temples. They passed cages where spotted leopards lurked and other cages that exuded the sharp and gamey smell of lion and the child laughed shrilly at

the scampering monkeys swinging on their bars in yet another place.

About the time that Kearney was sure he would faint, they came out into the air again and the man sat down with the child on a bench beside a pool in which seals were trumpeting.

Kearney sat down on another bench, exhausted. He sat breathing heavily and he told himself he should forget the whole thing. The man could be her uncle. He was just taking his little niece on a lark in the zoo, that was all. Kearney was about to find a path out of the park when he asked himself, *But why did he wait until the kid's mother was asleep?*

Kearney had no answer and he sat down again.

But he knew he could drive himself no farther. He was utterly exhausted and he was very ill and the shaking was almost a paroxysm now. He had to have help. Jesus, he thought, if I could only find a cop who would believe me. He saw a park guard and started toward him. The park guard regarded him suspiciously. Kearney turned away.

Then he had an inspiration. There was a nice old lady sitting on a bench. You could tell she was a nice old lady just by looking at her. She was the kind of woman everybody wanted for a mother.

Kearney steeled his flagging courage and approached her, hat in hand.

He said timidly, "Excuse me, ma'am, but do you see that man with the little girl just across the way?"

The old lady shrank away from Kearney. "What about it?" she asked.

"The kid's not his, ma'am. He kidnapped the kid from its mother down in Washington Square. I—I saw it. I been following them to see he doesn't hurt the kid. Maybe you could tell that guard . . ."

The old woman was on her feet, her eyes bright with fright. "You're crazy!" she said. "Get away from me, you crazy thing! Get away, or I'll call a policeman!"

Kearney hurried off. He was through. He'd tried to save the kid but he was a bum, a dirty, drunken bum and nobody would believe him. To hell with it. He'd get that drink. He started up a path that led out of the park. Then suddenly he saw that the man and the child had risen from the bench while he was talking to the nice old lady and were walking along in front of him. Oh, well, he thought. I'm not following them any more. To hell with stupid kids and stupid mothers who can't stay awake and stupid nice old ladies, too. I want a drink.

The man was carrying the child again. They curved around the edges of a lake. The man mounted steps to the wide crosstown street.

Kearney breathed a deep sigh of relief. The man was standing on

the curbing, looking up and down as if he were trying to find a cab. That settled it. If they took a cab, Kearney would lose them completely and he needn't trouble his conscience about it. With only eighty-five cents in his pocket, he could hardly risk pursuing them in another cab.

But the man changed his mind and began to walk west, still carrying the child. At Sixth Avenue, the man turned downtown. Despite his resolve, Kearney, breathing hard and sweating, was still following.

The man paused in front of a picture house that showed short subjects. He can't be taking a kid that age to a picture show, Kearney thought. But the man was purchasing tickets at the window. Kearney drew up close enough to hear the child say sleepily, "Mickey Mouse?"

The tickets cost fifty cents.

Kearney bought one, too.

In the darkness of the theater, Kearney lost his quarry.

He stood in the dim interior, dazed and dizzy for several moments. He stumbled about in the gloom, peering down aisles, seeing nothing. Ushers tried to escort him to seats, but he shook them off. Then he heard the squeaky child's voice saying "Mickey Mouse?" and he heard the man shushing her. They were sitting in a rear row, very close to where he was standing. Kearney took an end seat across the aisle, a row back of them.

The claustrophobia that had first attacked him in the bus assailed him again and he trembled so violently that the girl next to him turned her head toward him. She stared at him for a moment and then she changed her seat. The darkness was a heavy curtain that was smothering him. He could hardly breathe. His breath snorted out of his mouth so loudly that people around him turned and hissed at him.

He was parched for water again. There was a fountain in the back of the theater somewhere, but he did not dare seek it. The man and the child would get away. The man and the child had become a fixation with him now. He was going to pieces and the man and the child were the only things that were holding him together. They were showing a travelogue on the screen. There was a great waterfall. The foamy blue water and the splashing, bubbling sounds made a torture of his thirst.

He had been there forever. They were showing picture after picture, short subjects, newsreels, educational films, cartoons. Kearney's right knee was jerking up and down convulsively. He felt he couldn't sit still for another minute.

To keep from screaming, he tried to concentrate on the man and the child. He peered across the aisle. He could barely see them in the gloom. They were sitting very still. The child looked as if she

had gone to sleep.

What's he doing to her? Kearney asked himself.

There were twenty-four hour picture houses on the Bowery where bums went to drink and sleep. Maybe this was a house like that. Awful things were done in the all-night picture houses. Kearney had heard about some of them. Could the man be doing something unmentionable to the child here in the darkness?

Kearney shuddered.

I'm going into the rams, he thought.

I haven't even got the insurance against the snakes now. You can't buy a pint of anything with thirty-five cents in this neighborhood. Maybe you could buy it on the Bowery, but I'd never be able to get that far in time if the snakes start crawling now. You can't even buy a drink with thirty-five cents uptown. And one drink would never stop the snakes.

Then Kearney saw the snakes and he stifled a scream.

The snakes were right there in front of him, great, black, wallowing, flailing horrors as thick as tree trunks.

Kearney tried to rise from the seat and run out of the theatre. He had no thought of the man and the child now. He wanted only to flee the gibbering insanity of seeing the snakes. But he was paralyzed, frozen to his seat. He couldn't

move. He tried to make a sound and he only croaked.

Finally, he realized that the snakes were on the screen. It was a jungle film and they were showing the great snakes of the forest. If he only closed his eyes, he would shut them out. At first he couldn't close his eyes, because his muscles would not react to his mind's commands. He was in an almost complete state of shock. But, finally, the eyelids fluttered down and when the cool blackness came, Kearney exhaled his breath with a great sigh.

He kept his eyes shut a long while and he began to feel calmer and then he felt almost as if he could sleep, his reaction to the violent horror of the snakes was so great. When he opened his eyes at last, a quacking, technicolor duck was waddling across the screen. Kearney laughed aloud.

Then he looked for the man and the child.

They were gone.

Kearney was out in the open air almost before he realized that he had risen from his seat.

He stood in front of the theatre, looking around him frantically.

The man and the child were nowhere in sight.

He started walking, but he had no purpose. He was merely walking because he could think of nothing else to do.

Then he saw them. They were coming out of a soda fountain just

ahead of him.

Once again, Kearney followed.

They led him to Seventh Avenue. They were half a block ahead of him, when the man turned suddenly and carried the child down the steps of a local subway station.

Kearney ran to the subway station, staggered down the steps. It was a station for downtown trains. He could see the man and the child standing on the platform. He hurried to the turnstile, fumbling for the coins in his pocket. Then he realized he had to buy a token at the booth.

A train was roaring into the station now, coming to a stop.

Kearney tried to find change. In front of the booth, his fluttering hand dropped the coins to the cement floor. He picked them up, losing precious seconds. In his confusion, he shoved all his money, two nickels and a quarter, under the wicket of the change booth. The subway attendant pushed back a nickel and two tokens. Kearney clutched them and raced for the turnstile.

The man and the child had disappeared into one of the cars. The doors of the train were closing slowly.

Kearney's shaking hand could not get the token into the slot. By the time he had managed to deposit the token and hurl himself through the turnstile, the doors of the train were almost completely closed. He ran headlong at the

train, managed to get one of his big hands on the rubber insulation of the closing door, throwing all his weight against it. The door trembled as the compression valves exerted pressure on it, but finally it gave slightly and Kearney squeezed into the train.

He collapsed into a seat, panting and sweating. He looked up and down the car. The man and the child were not in the car. Kearney rose and stumbled through to another car. Another and another. He had passed down the length of five cars before he discovered the man and the child.

He stood on the platform of the car, trying to conceal himself from view, watching the man and the child.

An unpleasant thought occurred to Kearney. He had one nickel and one subway token left out of his dollar. If the man took another subway, he could follow. He could not follow further if the man took a bus or a street car. There was not a bus or street car left in the city that cost only a nickel. And the token was good only in a subway turnstile.

The man took the sleepy child to the very end of the line, to the Battery.

Kearney followed him out of the car, to Bowling Green at the ocean's edge.

The man carried the child into an old and dingy building. Kearney saw him pass through a gate

and pay a fare. This was the end of the line for Kearney. The man was not taking another subway.

Then Kearney began to laugh crazily.

The man was taking a Staten Island ferry. The Staten Island ferry was the only transportation system in Greater New York that still cost a nickel.

Kearney boarded the waiting ferry.

He found the man and the child on the top deck. The man was standing by the railing with the little girl in his arms. The little girl was wide-awake now, excited by the water, the circling gulls, the harbor traffic with its tooting horns and shrill whistles.

Kearney stayed well away from them, but he kept them in sight. At least they couldn't leave the ferry until it docked in Staten Island, he told himself.

There was a vast, brand new ferry terminal on the Island, Kearney discovered. He knew nothing about the Island, except that numerous Bowery drifters had been sent to a T.B. sanitarium there. It was out at the end of the Island, somewhere, he'd heard.

The man and the child were heading for the buses that were parked fender to bumper outside the terminal.

Here was another problem, his final defeat, perhaps.

He did not have bus fare. He had only the subway token.

Crowds were hurrying toward the ferry for New York.

Kearney stopped a well-dressed man, extended the subway token. "Will you buy a subway token, Mister?" he asked. "I got to get bus fare out to the sanitarium. You can use the token."

The man looked at him disdainfully, shook him off. A terminal guard came up, put the arm on Kearney. He said, "No panhandling here, fellow. You want me to call a cop?"

Kearney said, "I was only trying to sell a subway token, that was all. I got to get bus fare."

"Move on now, you hear?" the guard said, shoving him. Kearney moved on. The man and child were almost out of sight now. A girl stopped him, put her hand on his arm. "I'll buy your token," she said. She gave him fifteen cents.

Kearney hurried after the retreating figures of the man and the child. He saw them board a bus. He had to run, but he made the bus. He gave the driver fifteen cents. The driver punched a paper ticket and handed it to him. Kearney sat down in the bus, several seats behind the man and the child. The child had gone to sleep again.

They came to a stop at a place called The Corners and many of the passengers got off the bus. The man remained seated, with the child in his lap. The driver took up Kearney's ticket, said, "You

getting off or you paying another fare? This is as far as you go for fifteen cents."

Kearney said, "I haven't got more money. Can't I ride a little farther?"

"Not unless you pay another fare."

Kearney didn't argue. He was used to defeat. He got off the bus.

Beyond the bus stop there was real country, with narrow strips of sidewalk running beside a sparsely settled area. Kearney watched the bus go off into the distance. It did not go far before it stopped again. He saw the man get off, carrying the child. The man turned up a road. Kearney began to run toward the road at a dog trot.

The man was well up the road, past the few houses, when Kearney finally turned off the main highway. In the failing light of late afternoon, Kearney could barely see him. There was no traffic on the road. The place looked as if it had been laid out for a housing development that had gone bankrupt before it was built. There were thick woods on both sides of the road.

The man turned into a woodland path and disappeared from sight. Kearney approached the point cautiously. He stood uncertainly for a moment, hesitant to enter the deeper shadows of the path.

Kearney went into the woods.

He saw the man in a clearing. The man laid his coat on the ground. The child was lying on the coat, sound asleep. The man knelt beside the child. The sinuous, reptilian, caressing movement of his arm and hand had begun again. The moving hand made Kearney think of the snakes, the snakes that were always waiting for a drunk like him. There was sickness inside Kearney. Bile rose in his throat. For a moment he leaned against a tree, but he kept his feet.

The hairless man was bending over the child now, his body close to hers, his fluttering hand fumbling with the hem of her little skirt, the other hand poised over her mouth to stifle the scream that was sure to come in another second.

Kearney rushed the man. He was sick and weak, but he managed to pull the hairless man off the child. He used the weight of his body, held the man to the ground.

The child awakened and began to scream as the two men rolled on the ground beside her, flailing at each other. Kearney felt the man's knee smash into his groin. The pain was a knife thrust in his guts. With his last strength, he sent his fist smashing into the soft man's jaw.

Then Kearney passed out cold.

The soft man lay on the ground, moaning. The child jumped up and down, screaming wildly. Kear-

ney didn't hear the moans or the screams. He didn't know that police cars prowled this woodland road regularly and he didn't hear the two harness cops threshing through the wood toward the screaming child.

When Kearney regained consciousness, the harness cops were there, with their guns out. The soft man was sitting on the ground. The child had quit screaming and was sobbing softly.

"... saw him get off the bus with the little girl. Didn't seem right, a fellow like that with a little girl," the soft man was saying. "I followed them into the woods. Couldn't find a policeman there at the bus stop. Thank God you got here in time." The man fumbled in a pocket. "My business card. James G. Parton, Acme Insurance Company. Got a little house near here, on Sycamore Place. Often walk in the woods before dinner. Oh, God, he's hurt me ..."

Kearney tried to speak. The sweat was pouring out of him.

The tremors were on him now so bad his teeth were rattling. The snakes are out now, he thought. They'll come crawling out of the woods, hundreds and hundreds of them and I haven't got the pint to kill them with.

"No! No!" His voice was a croak. "He had the kid. Followed 'em all the way from the city, from Washington Square."

One of the cops gave a short laugh. "Okay," he said. "Let the kid tell us. She's old enough to talk." He put an arm around the sobbing child. She rubbed a soiled fist in her eyes and quit sobbing. She was only sniffing now.

"Which is the bad man, honey?" the cop asked. "Which man tried to hurt you? Tell us, honey, which is the bad man?"

The child's mood changed suddenly, remembering the candy and ice cream and the wonders of the zoo. Snuggling against the big cop, her face tear-stained, she cried.

"*He's* the bad man!"

She was pointing her stubby finger straight at Kearney.



Very Grand Larceny

In Rome, Italy, Gustavo Zontini went to a police station to report the theft of several packages from his parked car. When he returned to his parking space, he found that his car had been stolen.

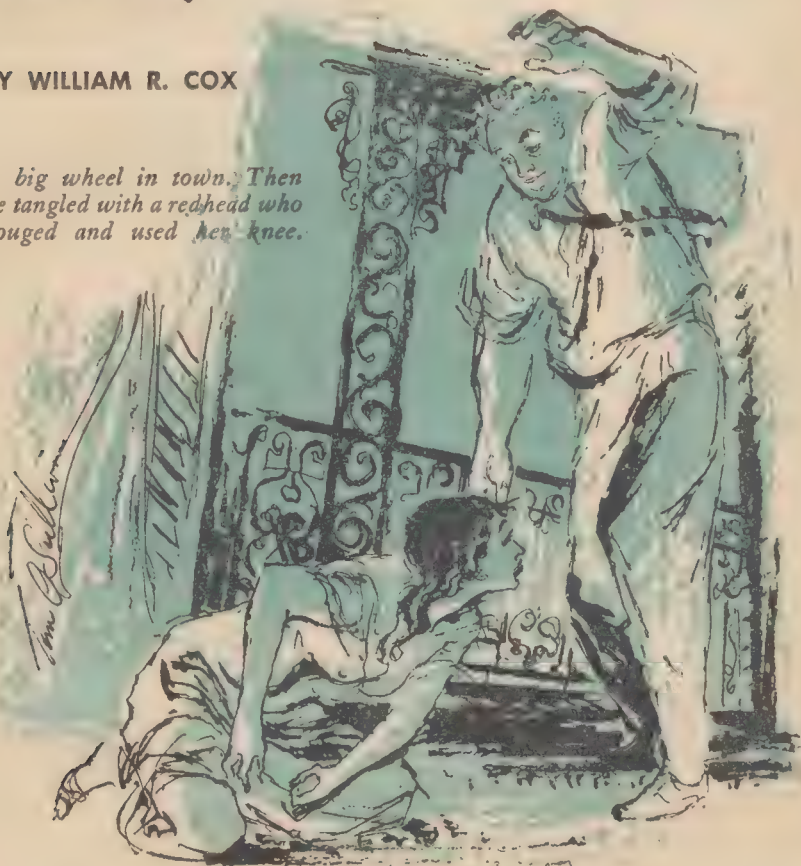
Blood and Moonlight

BY WILLIAM R. COX

*A big wheel in town. Then
he tangled with a redhead who
gouged and used her knee.*

LANGTON parked the police car at the intersection of Bourne Street and Shyve Square. There was a patch of white moonlight and a dark hump of clean-smelling jasmin and he stopped a moment, looking up at the one lighted window in the cheap flats. Then he said, "The hell with it. It was a long while ago."

He went up to the fourth floor



and into the dingy, close aura of poverty and death. Young Johnny Lee was there in uniform, waiting for him.

"Hi, Lang, they get you up?" Johnny was new on the Force and uneasy. "This ain't nice."

"She in there?"

"Uh-huh. The coroner's on his way."

Langton went into the bedroom. Betty Lou lay across the bed, her legs dangling awkwardly, her stockings twisted. She was wearing a slip, but she never had been one for underthings, he remembered. He felt he should put a sheet over her, only it was better the coroner should see her like she was. Everything would have to be as tight as they could make it if they expected to get a conviction. Which they would not get, he told himself.

It was a shame about Betty Lou. She had been real pretty before she married old, drunk Jake Harris, when Langton had been going with her. Too easy, but pretty and with a nice, pert way about her. There had been other moonlit nights he could remember, and he had almost married Betty Lou.

Then she ran away with Jake, who didn't last long, and then she had picked up with Harry Jay Wynne.

Then it was no use.

It wasn't that Harry Jay was married, though he was. It was the Wynne way with women that set them aside, put a mark on them.

Many a time in many a bar, Harry Jay made his brag, "Any liquor, any gal. I got a strong stomach."

It was about all he had left. Everything else had been spent. The family money, his youth, most of his good looks, his own mother, all down the drain.

Old Miz Wynne had been a Hunter. A good woman and a proud one, she spent plenty money keeping Harry Jay out of jail and paying off the men after Harry Jay got the women. When she died, holding her son's hand, she was only worrying because she wouldn't be around to keep him safe, because the money was all gone.

Harry Jay knew the answer; he married the Crosswell girl, the elder, not so pretty one, Elinor. The family fought it, but lost, and then they rationed him, just enough money for food and drink and clothing. He had a little real estate business and he was able to do business by exploiting the family names.

That was the city, to which progress had come in every other way, but not in this way. The old names hung on; you couldn't do anything to the Wynnes or the Hunters.

Langton reached out and defiantly dragged a soiled thin blanket over the slim legs and lower torso of the dead woman. There was a bullet hole beneath the plump left breast and he left that exposed where the slip had pulled away.

Langton asked, "He been picked

up yet, Johnny?"

"On the corner. Drunk to the nines. Had the gun on him." Johnny Lee tried to make it sound routine. "Ran right into me. Sent him in with Jackson and come up here. I ain't touched anything. Figured it's open and shut."

"You ought to know nothin' is open and shut when there's a Wynne in it." Langton moved about the unkempt, ill-smelling flat. "It ain't like Betty Lou was anybody."

In the closet he found male clothing. There were pajamas and a spare white suit the men wore that year and a laundry bag hung on a rusty nail. He emptied it on the floor.

A shirt fell out. It was a white shirt with an attached semi-stiff collar. There was blood on it. Langton said, "Nobody but Harry Jay wears this kinda shirt."

"That'll do it," Johnny Lee nodded.

In a dresser against the wall there were underclothes, but no other shirt."

"Looks like he kept a change here. Stands to reason there oughta be another shirt. Or he's wearin' it."

"He wore a clean shirt. Seemed funny, him so drunk. Like he oughta be mussed up. But the shirt was spankin' clean."

Langton looked at Johnny Lee. "That's good police work, noticin' things like a clean shirt. I'll remember that, Johnny Lee."

The boy flushed. "I hope we can hang him, Lang. The way he does, it ain't decent. His wife and everything. Why, he even cheated on Betty Lou. He was down to Mammy Todd's at least once a week, when he had the price and she had a new young whore."

Langton said, looking around the mean lodgings, "Hell, he didn't even keep Betty Lou good."

The Coroner came then and they let him take over.

The gun, thought Langton, and the bullet and the bloody shirt all put together would hang anyone. Maybe this time Harry Jay wouldn't get away with it. Maybe this time there wouldn't be a woman to save his neck.

Langton sat uncomfortable in the hot, crowded courtroom. The State had sent down a prosecutor, a right bright man, and he was summing up the airtight case the police had handed him. Harry Jay Wynne was dressed in a quiet gray, some of the harsh lines gone from his arrogant, fleshy face, his hair slicked back, his confidence unshaken. Only his eyes were bad; astigmatic, bloodshot, watery. Maybe someone had slipped him a half pint to bolster him for the ordeal.

Their glances crossed for a moment and Harry Jay glared hatred for a moment. That was because they couldn't shake his testimony on the stand and because everyone in the court had known

that Langton fully believed Harry Jay's guilt and people believed Langton.

The expensive defense attorneys had managed to dig up the old romance between Langton and Betty Lou, but when Langton admitted it and guilelessly stuck to facts, there had been no doubt in anyone's mind that he was telling the truth. Harry Jay, living or dead, would always hate Langton.

It looked like he might die, at that. Every item of evidence dove-tailed, his defense of having found Betty Lou dead and blacking out through grief and rage fell apart on the matter of the bloody shirt that he had doffed before he left the flat on Bourne Street.

Langton stared at the jury. He did not like it, composed as it was of semi-professionals, the ones who turn up in every panel, the hangers-on whom clever defense attorneys always manage to select. Their unintelligent faces reflected nothing, they listened in somnolence, apathetically slapping away the summer flies which invaded the courtroom.

The evidence of expert bullet men, the big blow-up pictures of the bullet meant nothing to them. Only the prints of the nearly nude dead woman had brought them alive to lick their chops and breathe through their mouth for a salacious moment of thrill. They were a bunch of nothings—still he couldn't see how they might vote acquittal.

Elinor Wynne sat in the front row of spectators. She had not gone near Harry Jay, which was kind of funny, Langton thought. Every day she sat in her black and white costumes, cool and detached and neat, watching, her lined face expressionless. Langton couldn't figure her out. These people, the Croswells and Wynnes, might revile each other in private, but it was their age long habit to stick together in a crisis.

The prosecutor wound up his peroration in a blaze of forensics. He was shrewd; he knew he had to stir up the jurors and lift them out of lethargy. It seemed to Langton that he had got to them, that they were awakening to the fact that a crime of murder had been committed.

Harry Jay felt it. He moved restlessly, perspiration beading his high, white brow. He half-turned toward the jury box. The prosecutor impaled him with a quivering forefinger, opening his mouth to make a flat accusation.

The woman's voice was loud and clear, interrupting, "Stop this! It's all a mistake! I admit I killed her!"

Langton swore and rushed across the space between them and tried to get at her, but people milled about and he could not get past them. He saw Johnny Lee stumble and cursed savagely, shoving men from his path.

The emotionless voice went on, "She broke up my home, stole my

husband. I shot her. Harry Jay took the gun to protect me. I can't let him go through with it."

Langton got to her. He seized her without ceremony, clapping his hand over her mouth. She did not struggle. She went quietly up the aisle, between the rows of staring, buzzing spectators.

In the detention room, Langton said, "That was somethin'. Did his lawyers put you up to it?"

"I'm ready to make a statement," said Elinor stonily. "I killed her."

She had never been beautiful. Years of living as Harry Jay's wife had given her a peculiarly aloof expression, as though she was an onlooker at life, never a participant. She had a certain style, something inherent in her family, but she was not sexually attractive, Langton decided. It was said she drank secretly and this he could believe.

"First his ma. Now you. How come he can get a woman to do for him every time?"

"I killed her."

"Seems like you'd want him hanged. You ain't old. You got life in you."

"She broke up my home. I killed her."

"You busted that trial all to hell, to save his neck. This county ain't about to go to the expense and trouble of another one and nobody is about to try you. For him, you did it."

"I'm guilty. Bring in your stenographer."

"What's he got? Why do women always save him? He treats you bad. He's no use under God's sun. Why don't you let him hang and be rid of him?"

She shut her mouth tight. He felt he was getting through to her, but it was like she was hypnotized or something. She would not look at Langton. She stared at the wall, her face showing nothing.

He heard the lawyers yapping outside and knew he was powerless. He said, "So that's the way it is. And I bet you if Betty Lou was here, alive, she'd testify for him, too."

Still she betrayed nothing. He opened the door and let the lawyers in. He went out and walked down to Bull's Tavern and sat in a booth in the back and ordered bourbon and water and after a moment Johnny Lee came in and sat across from him.

"Thought you'd be here."

Langton said, "Yeah. Have one."

"It ain't right. It plain ain't right."

"No. It ain't right. Lots of times you ain't sure. Maybe yes, most likely yes, but you could be wrong. Not this time."

"He beats up on the gals down at Mammy Todd's. I been checkin' around on him. He beat Betty Lou plenty."

"I wonder if he beats her."

"Her? Oh, you mean Miz Wynne?"

"It's somethin' he's got. Some-thin' that ain't any good to the

world, but that gets the women."

Johnny Lee said youthfully, "Mebbe he'll meet one some day. One that'll really rap him. Maybe he'll get it from a dame some day."

"I want to be around when that happens." It wouldn't ever happen, Langton knew. It was something which would always baffle him. It was something he had no power to alter, a wall he could never climb. It would worry him always and he would try and do something about it, but he had a bad feeling about what the outcome would be.

Weeks went by. Langton failed to get a promotion he had earned and he knew the reason. Stubbornly he managed to keep an eye on Elinor and Harry Jay. He saw them around plenty, but never together. Elinor was out on bail, her trial docketed two months hence. It was doubtful in Langton's mind that she'd get much. Temporary insanity maybe—put away for a short while, and then out. Tough on stone-dead Betty Lou, of course; but it was Harry Jay who needed the clobbering. Harry Jay went on as usual, doing the things he had always done, getting a little worse as he coasted down the hill. Mammy Todd barred him and made it stick through a bully boy she kept as bouncer. Langton protected the bully boy; he could do that much.

Elinor played contract bridge. There was a game which had been

going on for ten years, all the same women from the old families, and sometimes they played twenty-four hours at a stretch, drinking whiskey and dealing the cards like female automatons. She never missed a session. Some of the other wives catted around on the side, but not Elinor. Just cards and whiskey for her and you never saw her drunk, either. She had a very straight back and her eyes were deep-set and hidden.

One night Langton met her on a deserted street. It was late, after a bridge session and maybe she had been drinking a lot. He said, "I'll walk you home, Miz Wynne. Been some muggin's lately. It ain't safe, walkin' alone."

She laughed. He had never heard her laugh before. It was a harsh and brittle sound. "Thank you, Langton. You're a polite boy."

Their heels clicked on the paving. When they got to the old Crosswell place with its mansard roof and the thick honeysuckle vines, the moon made the night mysterious. She paused and spoke again.

"Betty Lou—was she a nice girl?"

"I couldn't say what she was."

"You were in love with her once."

"Does that mean I knew about her? What does a man know about a woman?"

"You slept with her. You held her in the night and listened to her. What was she like then?"

He could not have been more startled if she had pulled a gun on

him. He stammered, "It was long ago, ma'am."

"Yes. Long ago and now forgotten. Good night, Langton."

He stood in a daze, watching her straight back go up the walk. He could grasp no meaning from the strange conversation. Maybe, he thought, he was out of his depth completely. Maybe he ought to forget Harry Jay, forget Betty Lou's death, put it all out of his mind.

He could not. He was in the Bardsley Hotel on Saturday night because he knew that Harry Jay was there, upstairs in a room with the new Yankee manicurist, the redhead that all the bloods had been courting. He heard the commotion all the way down in the lobby and saw the red-faced anger of the clerk as he phoned the room and got no answer. There was no house detective in the ramshackle old Bardsley and the clerk turned to Langton.

"Sure wish I could do somethin'. He's been kickin' up a fuss in here ever since Mammy Todd ran him out."

"Who's he got up there?"

"The redhead."

"Thought she was choosey?"

The clerk looked puzzled. "I coulda sworn she was straight. You know what I mean? Maybe if she liked a guy a lot. But she fluffed off a dozen better men than Harry Jay."

"He did it again," muttered Langton.

"Huh? What'd you say, Lang?"

"Nothin'."

There was the sound of furniture being shoved around. Loud voices floated down to them.

"You know I can't make no complaint against him," the clerk said. "I'd be fired if I did. It ain't right people like him can have a man fired."

"It ain't right a lot of things." Langton's ear was cocked. He was off duty and his own position was precarious. He told himself he was an officer of the law twenty four hours of the day and if an assault was taking place he had a right to interfere. It might hurt him in the end, but he had a right.

The woman screamed. A chair turned over. The woman yelled again and maybe she had yelled for help.

Langton went up the rickety stairs. The clerk called a panicky warning, then followed without haste, frightened but hopeful.

Behind the flimsy door, Wynne's voice held a note of high excitement which held Langton motionless, puzzled. It was like Harry Jay was having fun. "I told you I'd give it to you. Get up and I'll do it again."

"You louse," said a husky, angry girl's voice. "So that's the kind you are."

"I'll hit you again! Get up, I tell you."

"And I thought you wanted to play. You dirty, perverted slob."

"I'm going to hit you," Harry Jay said in that strained, happy tone. "I'm going to hit you harder and harder..."

Langton went in, breaking the door with his shoulder, slamming it wide. He stood a moment, taking in the scene.

The girl crouched on the floor. She had quite a lot of red hair streaming over her shoulders. Her blouse was in shreds and her skin was creamy white and youthful and nice. She had bright blue eyes with a lot of gray in them. There was a slight cut at the corner of her wide mouth, but when she looked at Langton she grinned, showing white, even teeth. She was not a beautiful girl, but she was young and healthy.

She said, "Am I ever glad to see you, copper?"

She'd been around. She knew a cop when she saw one. She was, Langton observed, unafraid. She was angry, but she wasn't scared, not of Harry Jay, not of anything.

Langton said, "You want to make a complaint?"

She got up. She had long legs and arms. She tried to put her blouse together, failed, shrugged. "What do you think?"

Harry Jay had recognized Langton. "Persecution. Always following me. Hounding me. You're the one. Langton. I know you. Persecutin' me."

Langton explained to the girl, "I can't do nothin' if you refuse to

sign the complaint. Mostly they say they will; then he talks 'em out of it."

"He would, he would," she nodded. "A real cute cracker boy. Talks up a storm. How do you think he got me up here? Booze and fast talk. Real cute."

"Persecution. You ain't going to let this crooked cop do anything to me, are you, honey?" Harry Jay took a step toward her.

The girl winked at Langton, asking a question with her eyes, and Langton nodded. He poised, ready to move, watching, great satisfaction in him as the girl stepped to meet Harry Jay.

She was too smart to hurt her knuckles. She swung one of her long arms. One breast came loose from the blouse, lifting as she cut with the edge of her hand. She caught him between the shoulders and the ear, a knifing slash. Harry Jay staggered. She pronged two long fingers and jabbed. She got him in the eyes and he gasped, sinking toward the floor.

She brought up her knee and nailed him on the nose and then stepped nimbly back before the blood could spatter her nylons. She said calmly to Langton, "Self defense, huh, copper? You saw him attack me."

She put her white breast back into her torn brassiere and re-examined her blouse. The clerk said excitedly, "I seen it. He tried to kill you. Okay, Lang?"

Langton said, "You got to go along with us to sign the complaint. If you do that, sister, it was self defense."

The girl stared at him. "What have I got here? A wheel?"

"Ma'am?"

"This jerk." She indicated Harry Jay with her toe. "He's a shot in this burg?"

"Yeah."

"He can cause trouble for me? And you?"

"Unless we rap him with a signed complaint."

"Then what happens?"

"Judge Haycock is kinda sore at him. I think we can get him thirty days."

"Whew! Now that's a stiff bit!"

She surveyed Harry Jay contemptively. He was mumbling and trying to stem the nose bleed. The girl took a quick step and kicked. Harry Jay went over backwards, clapping both hands to his mouth. The girl said, "I think I got a tooth. That'll help."

Langton said, "That's enough. I can't let you do no more to him."

The girl nodded. "Yeah, it wouldn't look good." She went across the room and picked up a light cloak. I'll just put this on. The blouse speaks for itself, huh?"

"Yeah," said Langton. He sent the clerk down to call the wagon. He looked at the girl and he had to grin.

She said, "This guy should be stashed away, you know. He's

queer. You don't like him, huh?"

"I'm a cop. I just do my duty."

"You read the lines good," she laughed. Then she sobered. "This is a real grim deal. What's with this Harry Jay?"

He told her a little about it, as much as he could make clear. He ended; "It's always some woman, you see. They get him off, they protect him. Somehow he does it to them. He gets away with it, because of the women."

She stared at the man groveling on the floor. He was an unlovely, suffering animal toward whom no sympathy need be expended. She said, "No crummy queer is going to slug Minnie Barnes and get away with it."

Langton reached down and got hold of Harry Jay's collar. He hauled the glibbering figure upright and said, "You hear what the lady says, Harry Jay?"

Amazingly, Wynne spoke calmly, "Sorry Langton. You can go now. Won't be any further trouble."

Langton shook his head. "You didn't hear the lady."

Harry Jay turned to the girl. He smiled, oblivious of the fact that she had broken a tooth and so spoiled the effect. "I'm terribly sorry, honey. I was drunk. I'm all right now. Let's forget it, shall we? I apologize."

It was amazing the way he turned on a sort of charm. He was —What was the word? Debonair, that was it. Like in the old stories

about his ancestors. Gay, debonair folk, Langton remembered. It almost sounded like he had made a slight error, the first of his life, and was truly sorry.

The girl said, "Listen to him."

"You'll forget it, won't you honey?" wheedled Harry Jay. "Just tell Langton you don't want to make charges."

She laughed again. "How about him? Come on, copper, let's get with it. This bum's got to learn."

They went down the stairs and into the lobby. They were going toward the street exit, with Harry Jay trying to keep up his head and shake off Langton's steadying hand and the girl tall in her cloak, her red hair thrust back in a knot, when the clerk intercepted them.

In Langton's ear he whispered, "Miz Wynne . . . she came in, asked me about it. I hadda tell her. I hadda . . ."

Langton walked on, pushing Harry Jay out onto the street. The moon made it almost like day time. The wagon was always slow and tonight there was still no echo of its siren. Since the girl had laughed, Harry Jay had not said anything. He was emptier than Langton remembered, much emptier than in the courtroom when he had been on trial for murder.

There was little traffic and no people about in this neighborhood and the moon cast black shadows against the buildings. They stood on the corner waiting and none of

them spoke. Langton was admiring the girl with the unofficial section of his mind and thinking about Harry Jay with the other. It was Johnny Lee who had hoped for a woman who would turn him in and now it seemed that she had appeared.

Wynne made another effort, slowly, painfully. "I'll have your badge for this, Langton."

"You'll try."

"I can get it. I kept you from promotion. You can't do this to me."

"I hear you sayin' it."

"There's still a chance, Langton."

After waiting a moment, Langton asked quietly, "For Betty Lou?"

Harry Jay quit, then. The girl looked sharply at Langton, a question in her eyes. He could see her quite plainly, but he had nothing to communicate with her. He had a sudden disquieting memory of Betty Lou when she was young, when he had been going with her, a feeling of guilt, although he had not been the first to bed her down.

Outside the shimmering white glow of the moon there was movement. Langton, wrapped in his thoughts, did not perceive it. The girl, watching Langton, was oblivious. Only Harry Jay moved and said, "No!"

Then there was the flat report of a revolver and Harry Jay crumpled in Langton's arms, repeating, "No. Oh, no!"

Langton couldn't hold the dead

weight and Harry Jay fell down and lay in a heap and if he had seemed empty before, now he was depleted as though he had never been alive. His blood mingled with dirt upon the paving and he kicked once, feebly, and was still.

Elinor Wynne came out of the shadows and dropped the revolver. It landed on the body of her husband and rested there.

"She shot him. That woman shot him," said the girl.

Elinor Wynne came close and her face hadn't changed any. When she spoke, it was in the tone she had used that night when Langton had walked her home. As though she were explaining something, scarcely believing anyone would understand.

"Not again. Not for anything past or present. Because there never was anything, you see, Langton. Not really."

"Yes, ma'am."

The girl said, "Walked right up and shot him. Holy cow, that took nerve."

"Be quiet," Langton said to her. He was beginning to understand. He knew Elinor Wynne would not talk later and he wanted to hear her out. The siren of the police wagon sounded at last. "They won't convict you in this

country, Miz Wynne," he said.

"Convict me?" She did not seem to get the significance of this. "I just couldn't go to court again for him. Knowing everything."

"He'd have killed again, sooner or later."

She shook her head. "It is too much to expect of me. Sitting there in the courtroom, knowing they all were staring. Knowing he had never loved me. Never anything but the money."

She stopped talking and though standing there she was not with them any longer.

Langton said softly, "He played hell with women while he lasted. He sure played hell 'til his luck ran out."

He turned to the redhead. She was looking down at Harry Jay, who had turned so that the moon was on his dead face. It was a sorrowful face, now, the bad things crased, the weakness hidden by the fickle moonlight. One arm was up-flung like he was a small boy warding off a blow.

There were tears on the cheeks of the red-haired girl. "The poor bastard," she murmured. "What'd she have to kill him for?"

Langton turned wearily, looked toward the approaching red light of the wagon.

THE GIRL called herself Esme D'Artagnan. She had been nineteen years old, and proud of her body, which was beautiful. When men complimented it, she almost always acknowledged by saying: "Never had any complaints yet!" People finally complained

about it in July after it had lain in a closed apartment for eight days.

When the patrolmen got the door open, they found her in bed. They also found an empty bottle of sleeping tablets on the bed table. The next day the Medical Examiner found she had been pregnant

Ring the Bell Once

BY PAUL EIDEN



*What a shame. To destroy
such a beautiful body...*

three months. The day after that the reporters found the man who had been paying the rent for her apartment.

His name was Roger Clanahan and the newspapers had printed it often, generally describing him, although he was forty-six, as a "society playboy." He was an incurably vain, not very bright, man whose father had owned a large part of a large railroad. Clanahan had four expensive marriages before he took up breeding Doberman pinschers and renting little flats for girls with names like Esme D'Artagnan.

Clanahan told the papers the girl had come to New York for an acting career, and he had been "helping" her. She had been "just a friend" and he "hadn't known" she was pregnant. Then he got on a plane for the south of France. The same day, a widow named Mrs. Rae Evans sobered up and came down from Darien, Connecticut, to view the body that only got one complaint, ever. It was her sister's.

Clanahan stayed in Juan-les-Pins all summer and met lots of girls. Rae Evans cut down on her drinking, and after a while she altered a room in the basement of her French Provincial home in Darien. When Clanahan came back to New York in September, she was ready for him.

She sublet an apartment in the Eighties and began doing her drinking in the smart little bars

Clanahan's crowd frequented. She knew them all. One warm afternoon late in the month, Clanahan walked into the right bar at the right hour and they met.

The place was cool and dim and all but empty. Rae Evans sat at the center of the bar, a half-finished stinger before her. When she saw Clanahan enter, she called the bartender to her and spoke to him. The bartender, a tall, deferential Negro, went down to where Clanahan was climbing atop a bar stool and told him in a suave Louisiana voice, "Sir, the lady requests you join her."

Clanahan was a stocky six-footer gone to fat, with slack, petulant features. He was clothed in impeccably cut grey flannel. On a short, braided-leather leash, he led a huge Doberman. Clanahan squinted down the bar at Rae Evans. He did not recognize her. He needed glasses, but he was too vain to wear them.

Clanahan moved down to her, his step feeling light with the four scotches since lunch, the tentative smile of the flattered male set on his mouth. He saw a handsome blonde, tall, just past the thirty mark. She sat the stool gracefully, smart in a tailored black suit, nylons hugging a sheen on her crossed legs.

She said, "Hello, Rog. Let me buy you a drink."

Clanahan's smile widened. "Sure, but I buy." Without looking at the

bartender, he summoned him with a wave. "Booker." The tall Negro mixed a scotch and soda and placed it at his elbow. When he raised his eyebrows to Rae, she nodded and drained her stinger. He began blending brandy and creme de menthe in a mixing glass.

The dog sniffed the hem of her skirt and Rae fondled his thick neck. "That's a beautiful animal." The dog's coat was black and glossy, with powerful muscle flowing beneath it. He carried his big head alertly. "What's his name?"

"He's Champion Clanahan's Hans und Fritz," Clanahan said. "He's going to win Best In Show at the Garden this winter!"

"He will," the woman said, picking up her glass. "I'm sure he will. My husband wasn't worth a damn, but he knew dogs. The only interest he had—besides the bottle. God knows I watched him train enough of them." And she patted the Doberman affectionately on the head.

Clanahan eyed her nervously a moment, and then said: "I'm embarrassed, but—well, I don't know your name."

The blonde's smile was dazzling. "There's no reason you should. It's been eight years, Rog. I used to call myself Rae Jamison then."

Recognition widened Clanahan's eyes. "Oh, sure! You married old Schuyler Evans!" Then his eyes went wider still and his face sickened. "My God! You're Esme's sister!"

Rae nodded pleasantly, watching him.

Clanahan felt trapped. The dog, sensing his unease, stirred restlessly. "That was terrible, terrible," Clanahan said, longing to be anywhere else. "My God! That poor kid!"

Clanahan snatched up his highball and drank from it. "She never told me she was pregnant," he lied. "It wasn't my fault."

"Of course it wasn't your fault," Rae said consolingly, and patted his arm. "It was a lot of people's fault. It was her fault, for one. And it was my fault. And it was the fault of the drunken slob who used to beat our mother and us."

Rae finished her stinger and beckoned to the bartender. Her eyes were bitter, remembering. "He tried more than beatings on me, too. And when she got big enough, he must have tried it on her." She touched Clanahan's sleeve. "But, mainly, what happened was my fault. I was too deep in a sea of alcoholic self-pity when she finally got here to help her find a decent life, instead of just one with lots of money."

"Honest to God, Rae," Clanahan said, "I never promised to marry her."

The bartender placed two fresh drinks on the bar. Man and woman reached for them in unison. "You wouldn't have had to," Rae said with careful enunciation. "You only had to make a play for her and she looked into your eyes and saw

minks and yachts and fell down on the bed with her legs spread. I know how it is."

"Well, sure. You've been around," Clanahan said, hoping it was the right thing.

"There are always pretty kids like my sister and I chasing men with your kind of money," Rae told him. "There must be a couple of thousand of them in this city alone, sleek little huntresses, prowling the cocktail jungle. I wonder if they all come from back road shacks with no running water, like we did."

Clanahan gulped his drink, feeling surer of himself, excited by the proximity of her body. "You don't blame us then, do you? If we get all we can? A man doesn't take naturally to matrimony. It's his nature to roam from one woman to another, impregnating as many as he can."

Rae's intelligent green eyes studied him with a faint look of astonishment. "You surprise me, Rog."

"Well, I read that in a book on sex. But it's true. If Esme wanted to make a tramp out of herself for a few presents and a little money, that's not my fault." Clanahan put his glass on the bar with drunken carelessness. It fell without breaking and ice cubes slithered across the black formica. The bartender hurried to mop it up.

Smiling steadily, Rae told him: "You don't know what it is to be a pretty girl and dirt poor and

scared of staying poor forever."

The bartender placed a fresh drink in Clanahan's hand with insulting solicitude. Clanahan leered and moved so his knee dented one nylon calf. "How about you? You did all right when old Schuyler finally died. Don't feel sorry for Esme just because she wasn't as smart as you."

Rae smiled up into his bloating face and pressed her leg firmly against his. "Yes. I married that psychotic drunk because I knew he couldn't last five years the way he was drinking. So I served my time and wouldn't give him his divorce, and there was no way they could cut me out of my widow's share of the estate. But it made a drunk out of me, too, before he was dead."

Clanahan dropped a hand to her thigh. "Hell, enjoy your hooch. Nothing can hurt you now."

"Esme did." Rae shook her head mournfully. "I should have seen to it she got an education. And married some nice young guy with a decent job who would have been crazy about her all her life." She caught the grey flannel lapels suddenly and pulled his face gently down to hers. She kissed him lightly on the lips. "Let's get out of here, Rog. Let's go up to my place."

Clanahan shooed the Doberman into the kitchen and lurched back to the bedroom, shirtless and barefooted. Rae Evans lay on the bed, naked and uncovered. Her eyes lin-

gered coldly on the roll of fat above his belt, and then she raised them to his. She said with drunken honesty: "I'm going to kill you."

Clanahan mumbled the standard reply to that—"What a way to die!" He lunged at the bed.

Clanahan woke to early daylight with a splitting head. He was alone in the apartment. He staggered naked into the kitchen and found a pencilled note scotch-taped to the refrigerator: "Darling, I've got to go up to Westchester. Please don't mind my borrowing your lovely dog. I'll call you soon at your place."

Clanahan found tomato juice in the refrigerator and vodka in a cabinet. He blended two strong pick-ups and drank them off, wondering why she had taken the dog. Then he shuffled back to the bedroom and lay down. He was beginning to feel a little better. He pulled a wrinkled sheet over him and decided to sleep. There was a fatuous grin on his face. It had been a long time since he had had a brace of sisters.

In her home in Darien, Rae Evans called a New York number. When a woman answered, she asked: "Joanne?"

"Yes?" The reply was guarded.

"This is Rae Jamison."

"Well," the woman said. "Well, well, well."

"Now don't start talking like we were old sorority sisters. I only

worked for you when things were tough."

"Looking for a booking?" the woman singsonged, and laughed.

"No," Rae said angrily. "I want you to send a girl over to my place in the city. There's a man there."

"Who is he?" the woman asked, her voice quick with interest.

"Never mind what his name is," Rae answered her sharply. "All you've got to know is he's a hundred-dollar trick. Tell this girl to go up and let herself in and introduce herself as a friend of mine and let him do the rest. He thinks he's a great lover."

"Will she have any trouble with him?"

"No, I told you. And don't let her ask for money. I'm paying for this. I want her to stay with him three or four days. As long as she can manage. As long as he thinks she's a conquest and not a call girl, she'll have him eating out of her hand."

"And when do we get paid?"

"I'll be back in town the end of the week. You'll get it then."

"I better," the woman said warningly. "Give me the address."

Rae cradled the phone and picked up the highball glass that stood beside it. She took a long swallow from it. Without putting her hands on the arms of her chair, she got to her feet. She was quite steady. Clanahan's Doberman bounded to his feet and followed her out of the room, eyes bright and expectant.

Rae led the dog down a flight of stairs to the basement of the house. She unlocked a door and took him through it. The room they entered was twenty feet long, its ceiling and windowless walls covered by a new-looking coat of white paint.

Painted white stripes lay across the far half of the black composition floor, two feet apart. Seven long black cleats a half-inch thick had been nailed to the rear wall. They were spaced at six-inch intervals, the lowest three feet from the floor. A foot above the top one, a wooden peg held a square of bright red flannel. The room was bare save for a stepladder near the door.

From the top of the ladder Rae took a metal whistle strung on a lanyard, hanging it around her neck. Then she took down a clip-board to which was screwed an ordinary doorbell ringer, two flashlight batteries and a pushbutton, all wired in sequence.

A plastic bowl covered with waxed paper stood on the shelf of the ladder. The dog caught the odor of food and stood on his hind legs, forepaws high on the ladder, whining impatiently. Rae caught his paws firmly and dropped them to the floor.

The top of the animal's skull had been almost level with her chin. Feeling his weight momentarily as she held his paws, she judged he must weigh close to seventy pounds. The dog eyed her

eagerly, shivering with excitement. His jaw hung open, thin pink tongue curling about his long fangs.

Rae put the whistle to her lips and blew a short blast. Startled, the Doberman backed from her. She plucked a cube of raw steak from the bowl and tossed it to him. The dog caught and gulped it in one black flash of his head.

Face expressionless, the woman caught his collar and pulled him away from the ladder. She pointed to the bright red cloth, and, voice vehement, ordered, "Get it, boy! Get it!" At the same time, she pressed the button. The harsh clangor of the bell filled the room.

The dog leaped away from her, frightened by the bell. Rae released the bell and pointed to the cloth again. "Get it, boy!" Puzzled, the dog turned to look at the far wall, took a few hesitant steps, turned to look at her again. She repeated the command.

The dog turned again, took another step, which brought him across the first white line. Rae instantly blew the whistle. She tossed another cube of meat to the dog as he came bounding eagerly back. It disappeared down his throat like a bullet into the night.

Rae rang the bell and pointed to the cloth again. "Get it, boy! Get it!" The dog turned to the rear wall, moving a little more quickly this time. When he crossed the second white line, Rae blew the whistle; the dog turned and she

fed him another morsel of meat.

Beginning to understand what was expected of him, the dog turned back even before she rang the bell. He bounded to the third line and looked back expectantly as she raised the whistle. Used to training, and knowing the rewards that came with a lesson learned, the Doberman was enjoying this strange procedure now. The stump of black tail wagged fiercely.

The Doberman was puzzled when he crossed the last line and found himself at the wall. Rae watched patiently while he snuffled about, telling him softly, "Get it boy!" over and over. When at last he raised himself with a little jerk to sniff the bottom of the row of cleats, she blew the whistle.

The dog gulped the meat, hurried to the far wall, stood on his hind legs to touch the second cleat. The whistle blew again. He needed a little jump to reach the fourth cleat. When he got to the seventh, he was backing up a quarter of the length of the room for a running start.

Rae fed him the meat this time from her hand. She hugged the huge animal, her eyes bright. The dog was quivering with excitement. Whimpers escaped him. His eyes never left the red cloth.

"Now get it, boy!" Rae yelled, her voice harsh with excitement. The dog bounded forward with a joyous bark. It took him three savage lunges before he succeeded in pull-

ing the cloth down from the peg.

Rae's eyes on the animal as he gulped the steak that remained in the bowl were green glass chips, the only softness in her a small twist of regret around the mouth.

The martinis that had put her to sleep were rank on her breath when she summoned the dog out of the fenced back yard the next morning. Rae had to force him to sit while she fastened the clasp of a chain to his collar. The Doberman's coat glistened with dew and she could feel the vibrant aliveness of him in every eager pawing.

Rae fastened the end of the chain to a hook in the wall. The red cloth this morning was sewn tightly around the neck of a man's clothing dummy. Under it was a tight-packed roll of steel wool, giving the cloth a bulge as though it covered a man's larynx.

Rae passed the bowl of meat close to the dog's muzzle and he strained to reach it. She placed it high on the stepladder and came back to the dog holding the board with its electric bell. "You want to get it, don't you, boy?" she asked the dog, and rang the bell. The dog's head swung from her to the dummy in the far corner.

He barked and lunged at it. His claws slid helplessly on the black floor and the chain became a taut line from his collar to the hook sunk in the wall. Rae had to heave back on his collar with all her

weight before there was enough slack to free the chain from its clasp.

The dog's body was a glistening black shell exploding across the room. The dummy crashed to the floor. The Doberman's teeth sank deep into the steel wool. His huge body arched and bounded, the massive head shaking. Then he was trotting happily back to Rae, the scarlet prize in his mouth.

The third morning, the red covering over the steel wool larynx was replaced by flesh-colored light canvas, painted to almost the exact shade of the dummy's face. The Doberman went to the exact same spot like a shot, had very little trouble ripping it off.

The fourth morning, Rae drove the dog, unfed, down to New York. She turned it over to the doorman of Clanahan's apartment hotel.

Rae called him from the apartment in the Eighties at noon. Beside her on the phone table was the clipboard with its batteries and bell.

It took a long while for Clanahan to answer the phone. His "Hello?" was a croak.

"Well, hello. Rae Evans here. Did they bring your dog up?"

"Oh. Yeah, sure. Couple hours ago. How are you?"

"Fine, but my place is a mess. Nothing but empty bottles. Did you camp here?"

Clanahan answered with a phlegmy laugh. *You conceited bastard*, Rae thought.

"I had myself a *ball* while you were gone," he said. "Maybe I oughtn't to be a heel and tell you about it, but this neighbor of yours came in from Darien the next morning looking for you. Prissy-looking bitch, but with that hot-pants air about her. You know what I mean? I can spot it every time."

"What happened?" Rae asked, making it a delighted little squeal. "Who was she?"

"Never you mind," Clanahan smirked, wanting to take his own time about it. "I put the old Clanahan charm to work and that poor little housewife forgot all about her old man for life. She went nuts about me. Honest to God, Rae, the windup was I practically had to kick her out of your place last night."

I'll bet, Rae thought. "Who was she?"

"You could probably break down my gentlemanly reserve, although I swore my lips were sealed. How about seeing me tonight, if you think you've just got to know? And I know you do."

"You need a week flat on your back in a sanitarium, not a new girl," Rae told him, glossing it with a laugh. "Bring the dog to the phone, please, honey. I want to talk to him."

"Are you going to see me tonight?"

"All right, if you think you've got the strength. Please bring the dog now, Rog. I want to see if he

recognizes my voice."

Clanahan's voiced mumbled an affirmative, and was back in a moment, saying, "Here he is. Say something to the brute."

"Did you feed him yet?" Rae asked, reaching for the clipboard.

"My God, no! I've been trying to sleep off last night."

"Then so long, Rog, you fat pig!" Rae said flatly into the phone. She pressed the bell.

A savage, deep-chested growl came through the phone in her hand, Clanahan's scream blending with it. Rae held the phone to her ear, listening to the sounds of furniture toppling and the screams becoming groans, and then stopping entirely, buried under the growling of the dog.

Rae broke the connection. She sat

in the room a long time, staring at a patch of weak autumn sunlight on the Chinese rug, remembering the long road from the tar-paper shack in Pennsylvania and all the men like Roger Clanahan to whom she had submitted.

They talked about it everywhere that night, all over New York. In the bar where Rae Evans was getting drunk a striking brunette, who had once served a year for prostitution and was now married to the son of a former ambassador, said to her: "He was such a fabulous guy! Isn't it horrible!"

"It's horrible all right!" Rae Evans told her. "They'll destroy the dog now. And he was a beautiful animal. He had a beautiful body."



Begging Banditry

Theodore Adams, a wheelchair beggar in Butte, Mont., told police that he was robbed of \$2 in change by a bandit with an artificial leg. He said the man came up to him and accused him of "begging in my territory." Then, Adams said, the man wheeled his chair into a dark alley and robbed him.

Crime Marches on

Since no horse thieves have been reported since 1910, the Brunswick Society for the Apprehension of Horse Thieves, Troy, N. Y., has decided to broaden the purpose of its organization. The forty members of the society recently voted to include chicken thieves in its list of culprits.

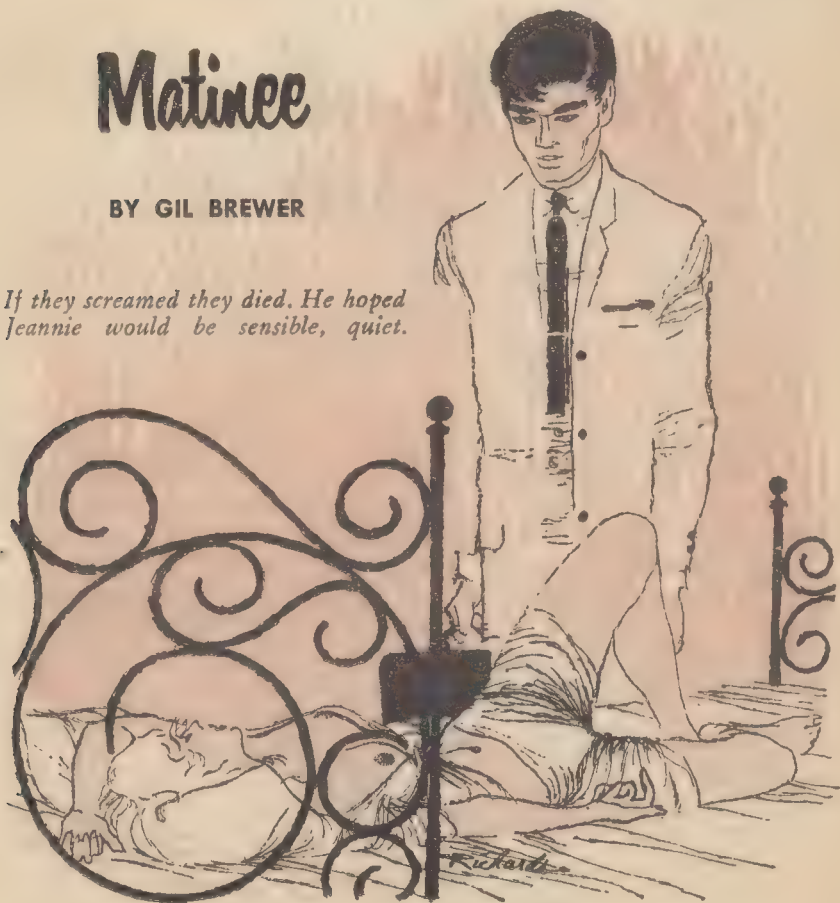
THE TALL young man, wearing the neatly pressed tropical worsted suit, stepped lightly down the stairs of the front porch of his home and started along the street toward town. He carried a sleek, brown leather briefcase under his left arm, held a cigarette in his right

hand. He walked through the late twilight of summer with a kind of cool determination. He was big across the shoulders, extra-heavy around the jaw, and his hair was an enormous, well brushed mop of black, the eyebrows dark and thick. He smiled a little to himself as he

Matinee

BY GIL BREWER

If they screamed they died. He hoped Jeannie would be sensible, quiet.



walked along. He looked at each house he passed, taking it in, absorbing each window, every porch. He looked particularly at any woman who happened to be sitting on one of the porches.

Occasionally, a car drifted by in the street. He seemed to ignore the cars purposely. He would turn his head away as they passed.

A young girl, perhaps eighteen, was watering a front lawn with a garden hose, and as he came along he looked her over carefully. She was very pretty, with long blonde hair and a contented, happy face, the eyes full of life. She wore trim yellow shorts and a dark cotton jacket, her slim, tapering legs ending in comfortable-looking moccasins. The man stared at her, still smiling as he walked along, and when she turned and saw him and nodded, he nodded back.

"Evening," he said.

"Oh, hello," the girl said. "It is nice, isn't it?"

"Perfect."

His smile went away. He turned his gaze to the street and took a drag on his cigarette, increasing his pace slightly. The girl looked after him as he continued on his way, her head cocked to one side. Then she shook her head and turned the hose against the bole of a tall royal palm.

The man crossed at an intersection, turned left. He finished his cigarette, tossed it to the sidewalk in front of him, then stepped on

it as he passed, without breaking his stride. This little gesture seemed to please him. He broke into a thin, airy whistle.

As he strode along, he changed the brown leather briefcase to his other hand and banged it against his leg. Traffic noises increased as he neared the business section, and so did the man's pace. Something seemed to be happening to him.

An eagerness seemed to slowly shadow his features. His lips became thinner, paler, and though his eyes were deep-socketed, and shaded by his brows, their intensity was obvious. His skin was rather pale, and as he walked along it seemed to become paler still, taking on a thin, barely noticeable sheen.

He ceased whistling as he crossed another street and passed a tavern. *The Tropical Inn*, a sign read. His step slowed. He lingered, passing the tavern, eyes intent on the small opening of a window. He stopped walking altogether, shifted the briefcase again, started for the door. He changed his mind.

A woman was walking toward him along the street and the sound of her heels pecking against the pavement brought him around a bit fast. He seemed to realize this and therefore moved with studied casualness to a fake-brick wall at the far side of the tavern window. He leaned against the wall as she walked past.

He looked her over, pursing his lips faintly, and reached for a cig-

arette. As he changed hands with the briefcase, his fingers left large splotches of perspiration on the polished leather.

The woman sensed his probing gaze and glanced consciously toward him, then quickly away, her face rather grim. Her stride increased very slightly.

The young man sighed and dropped his cigarette without lighting it. He looked his briefcase over, buffed it a bit against his thigh, then turned up the street again.

A dark-haired woman, very heavy in the hips, but otherwise pleasant appearing, as viewed from the man's position behind her, stood at a corner magazine and book store and fingered the vari-colored paperbacks in a steel rack. She carried an immense white purse in her left hand. The young man stepped up beside her, his head toward the books, his eyes looking her over. He couldn't quite see her face, the way she had her head turned.

"Have you read this?" he said abruptly, nudging her lightly with his elbow as he grabbed haphazardly at any book, and held it out toward her.

She turned, frowning. "What?"

He recoiled at a startlingly homely face. "I just thought—excuse me," he said. His voice was low and softly apologetic. "Never mind, ma'am." He put the book back. It was a book of cartoons, and his neck became slightly red. He did not look toward the woman again,

but turned and moved up the street.

He approached another tavern. This time he checked his pace before he got there, so that when he reached the glass doors, he was barely moving. He stopped, lifted his wrist, and acted as if he were looking at his watch.

Actually, he stared in the bar-room window.

Ridged muscles at the sides of his jaws jumped. He went quickly into the bar. It was empty except for the barman, and a woman in a red dress, red shoes, red purse, and jaunty red hat, seated at the bar. He started past her along the bar, turned suddenly and sat on the stool beside her, raising one hand toward the barman.

"Bottle of Bud," he said.

The barman, a bald, round-faced fellow, brought the bottle of beer and a glass, poured, took the correct change the young man had laid on the bar. The young man turned to the girl beside him, glanced at the light brown hair, the very red lips. The girl was drinking something thick and pink.

The young man chuckled softly, leaning slightly toward the girl. "Didn't think I'd get here in time."

She looked at him soberly and lifted thinly plucked eyebrows. "Huh?"

"Darned hot out there. Sure wanted this beer."

She looked at his beer, then at him, then away.

He laid the briefcase on the bar

between them, laid his left hand on the briefcase.

"It *is* rather warm outside, isn't it," the girl said.

He said nothing as he watched her finish her drink and glance toward the barman.

"Have one on me," the young man said.

The girl turned and leaned slightly away from him on the stool, looking him over boldly. She sniffed lightly through her nose, turned to the barman. "Hey, Charley—I'm switching to Scotch. Make it double, huh?"

"Do you like Scotch?" the young man said.

The girl looked at him again, but said nothing. The barman brought the drink and poured, apparently knowing she wanted water as a chaser. The young man started to pay for the drink, but the girl flipped open her red purse and beat him to it. She jerked her head toward him and said to the barman. "He's trying to pick me up. Trying to make a little time. Isn't that something?"

The barman looked at the young man.

The young man grinned. The barman looked away and went over to the cash register and punched.

The girl was having her little laugh. She mixed her Scotch with the water, took a good swallow, still snickering through her nose into the glass.

"Trying to pick me up, imagine."

"Is that so strange?" the young man said, sliding off the stool. He picked up his briefcase and stood behind her, looking her over. She had a lush shape, the softly compact form of her body showing obviously naked beneath the dress. The young man wiped his chin with the back of his thumb.

"It is in this case," the barman said, gently from where he stood by the cash register, with his back turned. "She's my wife, you see?"

The young man turned and quickly left the bar. He walked on along the street, and each bar he came to, he inspected carefully. He went into two more and bought beers and looked at the women, but nothing happened.

Finally he left the *The Sheltering Palms*, cut across the street, and bought a ticket at the window in front of a movie. He went inside and up some plush stairs to the balcony. It was between features, and dim saffron lights glowed around old Spanish style walls.

The young man stood at the very top of the balcony, in the doorway on the aisle, and looked around. There were few patrons. Here and there a young couple nestled close. He came down the steps of the aisle, moving slowly, lightly banging the briefcase against his leg.

A woman sat on the aisle and as he came by, he craned his neck at her, taking a good look. She saw him and smiled up at him and he paused for a moment, then went

on. A lonely-looking blonde head in the front row by the rail had taken his eye. He went to the far side of the balcony, then came walking along the front row, staring at the girl with the blonde hair.

Her elbow was on the seat-arm, her head resting in her hand as she stared down and out at the silent screen. Voices raised now and then in light laughter, in steadied conversation from below. The girl was plump and young, wearing black shorts that were drawn tightly about the coffee-colored flesh of her rounded thighs, her legs up on the rail. He walked slower still, looking her over. Full breasts nudged a bright yellow blouse, and on the very tips of her toes, swinging precariously over the edge of the balcony rail, hung high-heeled yellow pumps.

"Ah — um," the young man said, touching her right leg with his knee.

"Oh," the girl said, straightening suddenly, looking up at him. "Sorry—there you go." She brought her legs back, holding the knees up, to make more room between seat and rail. The young man couldn't seem to take his eyes off her. He started past, looking down at her. She watched him, red lips slightly smiling, eyes young and bold and happy. Her thick blonde hair tumbled down around her shoulders.

He moved one seat past her and sat down, with a seat between

them. Just then the lights dimmed and the screen blossomed with a newsreel. The young man came around in his seat like a shot, staring at the girl as the last lingering saffron from the wall lights vanished.

He sighed. She was watching him. He did not turn away. Gradually, she became quite plain seated there, with her legs over the rail again in the silvery light from the projectors. The young man was very nervous. He kept moving in his seat, first holding his briefcase one way, then another.

He stared at her boldly, and she realized this and began watching the screen. After awhile she began to check on him, and each time she did so, he was watching her. She became nervous, her head jerking a little. She did things to her hair, tugged at her shorts, fooled around with her blouse, now and then glancing toward him.

Suddenly, he slithered across into the other seat. The movement was hardly noticeable. The girl did not move, did not look at him.

They sat there. He looked at the screen now, breathing heavily, but very slowly, holding the briefcase in his lap. After a few moments, the main feature came on and he began to look at her again, surreptitiously.

Her breasts rose and fell under her blouse. Her legs were strained at an angle over the rail, but she didn't move them. She put her left

elbow on the seat-arm, and he seemed to move his there at the some movement, so they touched. She pulled hers away, then put it back. They began to press their arms against each other.

He turned to her and said, "Wonder if it's a good show?"

She tossed her hair, snapped a look at him. "I wouldn't know." But she did not move her arm. He turned still more in his seat and put his arm up around the back of her seat, staring at her.

She swallowed and looked at him. He moved his right hand down along the back of the seat until his fingers touched her shoulder and she didn't move, so he palmed her arm and pulled her toward him. She snuggled over against him and he sighed deeply as she looked at him and laughed softly.

"What you got in the briefcase?" she said, making words.

"Oh, nothing. Nothing really. Just some reports."

"Reports?"

"Just some junk from the office is all."

"Oh, you work in an office?"

They stared at each other, close now, friends.

"You always hang your feet over the rail that way?" he asked her.

She nodded. "Comfort, brother." But she withdrew her legs from the rail and brought them around, so her left thigh touched his leg, and they sat that way for a time, silently

pushing against each other. His face was covered with a heavier sheen of perspiration now, and the girl was breathing a bit faster. He slowly moved his lips over toward her cheek and kissed her, then whispered, "What's your name, honey?"

"Jean," she whispered back, turning her lips so they stroked his jaw. "What's yours?"

"Bill," he said, pulling her closer, staring down at her. The girl was breathing still faster now, her breasts thrusting. He released his briefcase, and moved his left hand around and ran it up along her throat, pulled her face over and kissed her on the mouth, and she turned on her hip on the seat, and kissed back. They broke it up, breathing hard. "Where do you live, Jean?"

She told him something, whispering thickly.

"Alone?"

"Family," she said softly, and made a small encouraging sound in her throat as he dropped his left hand on her leg and slid the palm along the plump flesh. She put her hand over his hand and held it tightly to her. His briefcase fell to the floor and he let it lay, suddenly moving his hand to the waistband of her shorts. His fingers slid under the waistband, then moved around to the snap fastening and his shoulders hunched earnestly.

"Fresh!" she said, giving his hand two quick slaps, snatching it

free. But she grinned at him and continued holding his hand so his fingers brushed her leg.

For a moment he had become rigid. He relaxed.

"Jean," he said. "Honey, you're nice — awful nice. Let's —"

A rough hand grabbed his shoulder, sent him sprawling back in his seat.

"What the hell's going on?" a very young voice said.

The girl jerked around, said, "Oh, Jesus," and snapped erect in her seat. Then she turned and looked up. A young boy in dungarees stood there, looking down at them.

"I was late," the boy said. "God-damn it, Jeannie. God-damn it. Oh, God-damn it!"

The man retrieved his briefcase and came to his feet. The boy looked puny alongside of him.

"You hit the road, God-damn you," the boy said, shaking with anger. "I'll tear your face off."

The young man glanced at the girl, turned and walked away down the aisle. He kept moving until he was over by the entranceway leading downstairs, where he stopped and peered back.

The boy stood by the girl and they were arguing. The boy waved his arms.

The young man took out a handkerchief and mopped his face. He held his hand out and watched it tremble. Then he put the handkerchief away and looked toward the

couple again, rather hesitantly.

The girl was on her feet, shaking her finger at the boy, saying something. Somebody back in the balcony called, "Shut it off, down there!"

The girl turned and started walking toward the entranceway to the stairs on the opposite side of the balcony. The boy went after her. She began to run. The boy ran.

The young man turned and ran rapidly down the stairs, came out on a landing, saw them running down the other set of stairs. He went on down to the lobby, passed an usher standing by a drinking fountain. He went quickly to a heavy sofa near the front doors and sat down, panting. His heavy mop of black hair was dank. He took out a comb, quickly combed his hair, put the comb away as the girl came into sight, arguing with the boy.

"I don't give a damn," the girl said. "You were late, Doug. I gave up on you. Go on back up there and see it alone."

"Aw, Jeannie—come on."

She turned once more and stared at the boy. "I told you, and I mean it. I don't want to see you again, Doug. I saw the damned old picture anyway."

"But, Jeannie, you said—"

She turned and walked swiftly across the lobby, out the front doors.

The young man waited, watch-

ing. The boy didn't see him. The boy went back upstairs, shaking his head.

The young man got up and hurried outside. There was no sign of the girl.

He looked both ways up and down the street, but she was gone. His face was tortured, the eyes sick, but there was still determination in them. He ran full tilt down to the corner and looked around. He saw her walking along slowly, by the curb, her high heels tapping, her legs flashing in the streetlights, nakedly curved and very pleasant to see.

She was no more than sixteen, this girl.

The young man stood by the corner and mopped his face as he watched her. He did not move until she was over two blocks down, and going away from the business section and into the shadows of an apartment building.

Then he started after her.

He followed her for twenty-three blocks. She walked along, occasionally pausing to rest her feet. He paused, too, usually beside a tree, becoming a part of the tree's shadow. When she moved, he moved. He stayed about two blocks behind her, and then when they were deep into quiet residential streets, she suddenly turned in toward a house.

He ran, ran like mad, along the grass, running as softly as a cat, his breathing rasping against

the cool darkness, holding the briefcase with both hands.

"Jean," he said, as he ran along. "Jeannie."

He reached the front of her house after she had closed the door, but he was quick enough to see her walk through a well-lighted living room. It was still early in the evening.

He looked around. There was no traffic at all on the street. He walked on past the house. He turned and searched the shadows of palms, hibiscus bushes, and tall Australian pines. He crossed the street and sat on a bench under a City Bus sign, watching the girl's house.

After awhile a bus came along. He saw it a few blocks away, got up and went back and stood behind some bushes. After the bus was gone, he returned to the bench again, waited. Cars passed. A few people strolled along the sidewalk, talking.

He waited, sitting perfectly rigid, holding the briefcase tight on his lap, now and then saying the girl's name, "Jeannie," or maybe just moving his lips.

He waited for three hours. Then, gradually, lights began to go out in houses along the street. He stared at the girl's house, and strained forward as downstairs lights went out and upstairs lights came on. He got up and walked softly across the street into the shadows beside the house. He walked around the

house, slowly, taking care not to step on anything, careful not to even brush a bush, and he made no noise at all.

The front bedroom was the wrong one. "Jeannie," he said softly, and hurried to the back yard. It was a long yard, spotted with orange and grapefruit trees. A light was on in a rear upstairs room.

He ran deep into the yard, straining his eyes at the upstairs light, and he saw her just as she pulled her shade; she was completely undressed.

He forgot himself and beat his hand excitedly against the leather briefcase. Then he realized what he'd done, the noise he'd made, and stood perfectly still.

There wasn't a sound. The night was dead.

He hunched down on his heels and waited. After a time, the upstairs light where she was went out. Still he waited. Finally, he arose and went around to the front of the house and checked, and all the lights were out.

He returned to the rear, sat down on the porch steps and waited, breathing rapidly, muttering to himself softly.

Finally, he laid the briefcase down on the steps and tried the back door. It was locked. He took a key from his pocket and in a moment he had the door open. He picked up the briefcase and pulled the tab of its zipper, open-

ing it, readying it.

"Jeannie," he said quietly, and entered the house.

Now was a time for caution, but also for boldness. In a victim's sudden fear lay the promise of success, if things got out of control. He had regretfully been forced to kill two girls who woke up screaming. Neither would listen to his pleading explanations.

Light from streetlamps illumined the interior fairly well, and he moved with precision, without the slightest hesitation through the kitchen, the hall, to the front stairs.

He went rapidly up the stairs, past the front bedroom door where snores rose and fell peacefully. He moved down the hall to the rear room. His first try brought him into a bathroom. He backed out and went to the other door. It was closed.

He hesitated, then tried it. It opened and he stepped into the bedroom, left the door partially open, and moved straight to the bed.

He stood above her, breathing shallowly. She was asleep with no covers over her, wearing snow-white shorty pajamas, sprawled out on the bed, beautiful and wanton in the freshening streetlight's glow through the side windows.

She lay on her back, one wrist over her eyes, the tops of the pajamas pulled up to her breasts. He looked at the smooth expanse of exposed midriff, then at the

pleated waistband of the pajama bottoms. They were slightly twisted, drawn very low over her hips from unconscious movements as she slept.

He leaned close above her. Her legs were wide apart and this seemed to displease him. He moved fast, set the briefcase on the floor then reached down and boldly, but gently, pulled the waistband of the pajama bottoms away from her body with a hand on either side. Now his face was sheened with sweat in the glow from the street-lights and he was close to panting.

The girl moaned, rolled, and

made mouth noises. "Doug—Doug," she said, and began to twist onto her side. As she rolled, he drew the pajama bottoms straight down to her ankles, and whisked them off.

He stood above her, moving his lips, and then rubbed the pajama bottoms caressingly against his jaw. "Jeannie, Jeannie..." he murmured.

He dropped the girl's garment into the briefcase and left the house as silently as he had entered. He hurried along the shadowy, deserted street, holding the briefcase tightly to him.



Bottled Loot

Burglars in Flint, Mich., were disappointed after they succeeded in removing a 500-pound safe from the home of Alfonse Van Walleghem. They battered it open, but found no money. However, they did find something with which to drown their sorrow. The safe contained four bottles of whiskey.

Husband Hunt

In Baltimore, Md., vice squad officers received a telephone call from a woman who complained that her husband was losing all his money in poker games. She gave Sgt. Vincent Serio an address where she said a game was in progress. Two patrolmen were sent to the address. They broke up a card game and arrested six men.

The phone rang again. "You didn't get him," the woman said. She explained that her husband had left before police arrived and that he was probably in another game. She gave Serio a new address.

This time the raiding officers broke up two games and brought nine men to jail. But the phone rang a third time. Same woman, new address. The raid brought in 13 more men, making a total of 25 players arrested in five games.

"We must have got the woman's husband in the last haul," Serio said. "She didn't call back."

*There seemed no good reason for Alan's demise.
After all, everybody loved him. Especially women.*



Deadly Beloved

A Joe Puma Novelette

BY WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

was a bum.

My office was hot and her voice petulant and I wondered why she wanted this man located if he was such a slob.

Which I suggested at the first break in her monologue. I said, "Maybe you're well rid of him."

She frowned, and her eyes grew faintly hostile.

"You say he married you for your money," I pointed out, "and that he's been unfaithful ever since. Is it a detective you wanted, or a divorce lawyer?"

Her face was stiff. "I want him back. So I'm a fool. But he's a pretty good man to have around, despite his faults." She colored

SHE WAS obviously past thirty, but I couldn't judge whether she'd reached forty. Her figure was firm, her face unlined, her hand-knit boucle suggesting she had enough money to keep her figure firm and her face unlined.

She was telling me about her husband and from her account I was gathering that the gentleman

slightly as she looked at me.

"Where would I begin to look for him?" I asked.

"Any one of a half dozen places. I'll give you a list."

"And if I find him, what do I tell him?"

Her smile was wry. "All is forgiven — and I'm waiting."

Some man, he must be. She wasn't young, but she was attractive. And rich. I said, "All right, Mrs. Engle, I'll get right to work on it."

She made out a check for the retainer and left me with the persistent fragrance of her perfume. I sat there for a few moments wondering if it was sheer loneliness that had made her seek my services or if this Alan Engle was some kind of superman. Why was it rich and attractive women were never attracted to *me*?

I took the check around to the bank and headed the flivver for Malibu. I had her list. Why hadn't she phoned these people to ask about her Alan? That might be embarrassing, but certainly not more embarrassing than sending a private operative to track him down.

On the Coast Highway, the bathers' cars were parked bumper to bumper on both sides of the road. To the north and east, the Santa Monica Mountains were dark green against the clear blue sky. If Alan Engle was out chasing quail, he'd picked a fine day for it.

The person I was on my way to see didn't live in the Colony; she lived in a beach shack south of there, out of the high tax area. I found her on a rock about fifteen feet from shore in front of her cottage.

She was wearing a simple black bathing suit without straps and there was a towel over her face.

I stood on the beach and called, "Miss Elizabeth Adams?"

She rose to a sitting position and nodded. "Who are you?"

"My name is Joseph Puma," I told her. "I'm — looking for Alan Engle."

She stood up and she was the kind of girl born to grace a swim suit. She just stood there looking at me curiously.

I said apologetically, "I rang your bell, but there was no answer, so I followed the path along the side of the house."

"That was shrewd of you," she said. "Are you a friend of Alan's?"

I hesitated, and said, "Not exactly."

"Did his wife send you?"

I nodded. "More or less."

Elizabeth Adams sighed. "Poor Alan —" She jumped down into the hip-high water and came wading toward me.

Her hair was dark and short, her eyes a dark blue. When she reached a quiet dialogue distance, she asked, "Do you know Jeff Roeder?"

Jeff was another private investi-

gator, a lad who got a lot of the carriage trade. I nodded.

Miss Adams said, "You're another one of those, I suppose?" I hesitated again and then nodded.

"Come in," she said wearily. "I'll brief you."

There were some steps leading up from the beach to the rear living room of the cottage. I followed her up those. At the door, she took a terry cloth robe from a hook and slipped into straw sandals.

The living room was mostly rattan and raffia, but warm and pleasant. The rear wall was all window, with a fine view of the shoreline.

Miss Adams indicated a rattan love seat and asked, "Beer? It's cold and it's Eastern."

"Thank you," I said. "It's been a dry day."

She brought a big copper mug full of beer and sat down nearby with a twin of it. She said, "I suppose Grace gave you a list?"

"Grace — ?"

"Mrs. Engle. I suppose she gave you a list of people to annoy."

I didn't answer that. I sipped my beer.

Miss Adams was looking at the floor. "Alan's not a — a bad gent. He — can be charming."

"How about Mrs. Engle?"

Elizabeth Adams looked at me. "She's fifteen years older, and it's *her* money. How would you like to be in a situation like Alan's?"

"Let's not be naive," I said. "It's the kind of situation I'm looking for. And so was Alan, probably."

She looked at me scornfully, saying nothing.

"Okay," I said. "So I never met him. But who twisted his arm? Did he *have* to marry this older woman with money? She bought him, didn't she? And now he doesn't want to stay bought. Well, that's a breach of contract, like any other."

"My," she said lightly, "aren't we indignant! Why, Mr. Puma?"

I drank my beer and smiled at her. "I'm sorry. I run into these cases now and then. This area is full of them. You don't know where Alan Engle is now, I suppose?"

She looked at me candidly. "I honestly don't. Jeff Roeder almost managed to locate the poor boy, though. So don't despair."

"I get paid either way," I said. "You know Jeff, do you?"

"I met him when he came looking for Alan, one time. We've gone out together a few times."

"Lately?"

She looked at me quizzically. "Within the past year. Why did you ask that, Mr. Puma?"

"Jeff's married," I said. "He's been married for six years. Did you know that?"

Color in her face. "Not that it's any of your damned business, but I didn't know that."

"It wasn't any of my damned

business," I admitted, "but if I'd thought you had known it, I wouldn't have mentioned it. Does that clear me?"

A half smile. "Some."

"He's a very handsome guy," I said. "He married money, too. That's how he gets the carriage trade. I wonder why Mrs. Engle came to me, this time."

She shrugged, and sipped her beer. On the Highway, a big Diesel blasted by and the cottage windows rattled.

Miss Adams shook her head. "Those — monsters. But I suppose they keep the rent down."

"You've no idea," I said, "where Alan Engle is?"

Her voice was sharp. "I told you I didn't."

I stood up. "Well, thanks for the beer. Have you any idea why Alan does come back when he's finally located? Has Mrs. Engle some hold on him?"

Silence, except for the traffic noises from the Highway. A frown and then Elizabeth Adams said slowly, "I understand Alan was in some trouble with the law at one time. I'm not definitely sure about that, though."

"Okay. Sorry to have been a nuisance."

She smiled. "You weren't. And you *did* tell me about that bum, Jeff Roeder, didn't you?"

I nodded. "You're too good for him, Miss Adams."

Her glance was wry. "You cer-

tainly love to jump at a conclusion. You could be just as wrong about me as you are about Alan. Happy hunting, Mr. Puma."

She came to the door with me and watched me climb into the flivver. I thought she looked lonely, but it could have been just wishful thinking. There wasn't any reason for a girl like that to ever be lonely.

My next stop was also in Malibu, but also not in the Colony. It was on the other side of the Highway, off a road that led up into the hills.

This was no cottage, but a large place of bright red barn siding and shake roof, on the bull-dozed top of a hill that overlooked the entire bay. A smock-encased thin man with paint on his nose was sitting on a redwood chaise longue on the front lawn. He had a drink in one hand and a magazine in his lap.

Somewhere a dog barked, as I stepped out of the car onto the blacktop of the parking area. I paused; I'm allergic to dogs.

The man called out, "It's all right. He's penned up in the back yard."

I came across a dichondra lawn to where he sat, and asked him, "Mr. Felix Sandow?"

He nodded. "You're not selling anything, I hope?"

"No, sir. I'm looking for a Mr. Alan Engle."

"Oh God! Somebody usually is. Does he owe money?"

"Not that I know of, sir." I looked out over the water. "Beau-

tiful view you have here."

"It is. Are you, by any chance, a detective?"

I looked back at him and nodded. "Have you seen Mr. Engle in the last three days?"

He shook his head and then frowned. "But I think my wife has." He turned his head to call, "Armine —"

A thin, short, dark woman in denim shorts and striped cotton jersey came around from the side of the house. She was wiping her hands on a paint-stained rag as she came over to us.

"This," Felix Sandow said, "is a detective who is looking for lover boy. Have you seen him lately?"

She nodded. "At Barge Shirvanian's party night before last." She looked at me concernedly. "Has something happened? Is Alan in trouble?" She looked at her husband. "You did mean Alan, didn't you?"

I answered for him. "Yes, he meant Mr. Engle. Do you know where he's staying?"

Her big, brown eyes rested on her husband for a moment before turning to me. "I don't. Is he in trouble?"

Felix Sandow said irritably, "Of course not, Armine. It's Grace on the trail again, no doubt. Please get that horribly maternal tone out of your voice."

Armine Sandow looked at me sorrowfully, saying nothing.

Sandow said, "Alan is the prob-

lem child of all the ladies in our snug little set. He gives them that lost little boy look and leads them tenderly to the bedroom. Let me prophesy that when you find him, if you find him, it will be in some smirking woman's arms."

"That's nice work if you can get it," I said, and turned again to Mrs. Sandow. "Did Mr. Engle come to the party alone?"

She nodded, glancing again at her husband.

"And leave alone?" I asked.

She took a breath. "He—brought me home. I don't know where he went after that."

"Didn't he mention where he was staying?"

She shook her head. Her husband sipped his drink, looking unconcernedly out at the bay.

I took out my list. "This party was at a Barge Shirvanian's? He lives in Bel Air, doesn't he?"

She nodded.

"Isn't he an agent?" I asked.

Felix Sandow said, "He's a purple-foot from Fresno, a peasant with literary pretensions."

Mrs. Sandow said calmly, "He's about the finest authors' agent in town. He handles some big names. Alan helped him finance his business when he first started. They're very good friends."

"Two of a kind," Sandow said. "They really belong together. The hairy purple-foot and lover boy, a stunning pair."

Mrs. Sandow looked at him

quietly for a moment and then at me. "You mustn't mind my husband. He resents anyone with talent, even me. Sorry I couldn't be of more help, Mr.—?"

"Puma," I said, "Joseph Puma." I gave her one of my cards. "If you learn of Mr. Engle's whereabouts, I would be grateful for the information."

She took the card and nodded, saying nothing. Her husband sipped his drink and belched. She was already going back toward the house when I walked over to the flivver. He still sat on the front lawn as I made the last big turn below that cut him from view.

2.

Those two calls completed the Malibu end of town; I headed south on the Coast Highway, past Miss Adam's cottage and the endless lines of parked bathers' cars.

It was a clear and beautiful day, a day for loafing, but I didn't have a rich or talented wife. From the two feminine numbers I'd seen so far among Alan's friends, I would guess that Mrs. Engle certainly had her problems. Still, she was rich and that made up for a number of lacks.

Bel Air, like Brentwood, is only an attitude; it has no geographical reality. The Shirvanian home was on a knoll, surrounded by eucalyptus trees, overlooking the constant traffic of Sunset Boulevard.

It was a two-story home of gray stone and copper roof, looking out of place, looking midwestern and substantial above the glittering cars on Sunset a few hundred feet below.

A maid told me Mr. Shirvanian was still at the office. Mrs. Shirvanian was home, however, and would see me.

The living room was furnished in heavy mahogany, and thick, dark-red Oriental rugs covered the floor. The drapes were heavy maroon velvet. The purple-foot had made good.

Mrs. Shirvanian was dark and short and heavy, but not unattractive. I told her who I was and why I was there.

She shook her head sadly. "Poor Alan. That wife of his—" She shook her head again.

"He's married," I pointed out. "That's bound to limit a man's freedom. Nobody's forcing him to stay married."

"Only his conscience," Mrs. Shirvanian said quietly. "If Alan should leave Grace, I wouldn't be surprised if she did something desperate."

I was getting awful damned sick of poor Alan and I hadn't even met him yet. I said, "How desperate? Do you mean something like cutting him out of her will?"

Mrs. Shirvanian stared at me reproachfully. "That was unkind. You don't even know him, do you?"

"Never met him," I agreed. "And

it looks like I'm not going to. Do you know where he is?"

She shook her head. "But Barge, my husband, probably does. He should be home any second now. He phoned fifteen minutes ago that he was on his way."

The maid came in with a tray and silver coffee service.

Mrs. Shirvanian said, "Do you like Turkish coffee? My husband and I always have a cup when he comes home."

"I'd like some," I said. "Tell me what you know about Alan Engle. He's beginning to interest me."

He was just a boy, she told me. A blond boy of twenty-eight, who had had small parts in a few B pictures and had been a prominent local radio announcer at nineteen and was now trying to get into TV.

"As an announcer or actor?" I asked.

"As either. He has a fair singing voice, too."

"He was in some trouble with the law at one time, wasn't he?"

Mrs. Shirvanian was quiet for a moment. Then she said softly, "Yes, when he was twenty-two. The girl — was fifteen."

I said nothing.

Mrs. Shirvanian's quiet voice had some protest in it. "But she looked *much* older. One of those full-bodied, brazen young girls this town is so full of."

"Fresno, too," I reminded her gently.

She smiled. "In Fresno, the par-

ents have more interest in their children."

Then a wide man of medium height was coming toward us from the entry hall, and I rose.

He had a virile, dark face and flint-hard brown eyes and a grip worthy of a man much heavier. After the introduction, he went over to kiss his wife.

"Good day?" she asked.

"Good enough," he said. "Sold Warwick to Metro for ten weeks. Warwick will come through yet, you mark my words."

"I'm sure he will," she said. "Mr. Puma is looking for Alan."

The hard brown eyes considered me. "Are you employed by Mrs. Engle?"

I nodded.

"I don't know where Alan is," he said curtly.

"Now, Barge —" Mrs. Shirvanian said softly.

He looked momentarily at her and back at me. Nobody said anything for seconds.

Then Mrs. Shirvanian said, "I've asked Mr. Puma to have some coffee with us."

He sighed. "My little peace-maker." He managed a smile for me. "She means Turkish coffee, Mr. Puma. Are you familiar with it?"

I said I was.

He sat on the davenport and leaned his head back. He covered his wife's hand with his, and closed his eyes, shutting out the world.

It was a pleasant domestic scene and uncommon in this area, but it wasn't getting me any closer to Alan Engle. I said, "Engle certainly can't solve any of his little problems by hiding from them, can he?"

Shirvanian kept his eyes closed. "He has only the one problem — Grace."

"He could divorce her."

Nothing from Shirvanian.

I asked, "Is Mrs. Sandow an Armenian?"

He opened his eyes. "Yes. Why?"

"Because of her first name — Armine. I knew an Armenian girl by that name at Stanford."

"Not Armine Dirkejian, by any chance?" Mrs. Shirvanian asked.

I nodded.

"Fresno girl," her husband said. "Beautiful girl." He closed his eyes again.

I stood up. "I don't think I'll have time for the coffee. Sorry I bothered you people."

Mrs. Shirvanian looked concerned; her husband couldn't have looked less so. She said, "Barge doesn't mean to be rude. He works too hard."

"Most of us do," I said. "I can find my way out."

Three calls and all I had was a character brochure. And a growing sense of frustration. The Fresno purple-foot hadn't meant to be rude; he was an executive now and no longer needed the friendship of inferiors.

Where now? I had nothing to report to Mrs. Engle and the remaining name on my list was way up in the Valley. I didn't intend to buck that Sepulveda traffic at this time of the day. I went back to the office.

I typed up the reports of my calls for the day and tried to find something in the printed versions that I'd missed in the actual. Nothing showed. Nothing, except an unusual sympathy for the plight of Alan Engle on the part of all his friends.

In my book, he had no tears coming. A pretty boy who had married money and now didn't have the guts to cut himself off from it. What was so pitiable about Alan Engle?

I was pondering that deep philosophical and psychological question when my phone rang.

It was Elizabeth Adams. "I've a lead for you."

"I'm glad," I said. "I knew you'd come through."

A momentary silence, and then, "Do you remember I told you Alan was once in trouble with the law?"

"I remember. And I've since learned it was because of a girl, a fifteen-year-old girl."

She sounded relieved. "Yes. I didn't want to tell you that. Well, she's not fifteen now, of course."

I did some rapid calculating. "No, she must be twenty-one."

"That's right." A pause. "And I heard less than an hour ago that

Alan has gone back to her. You might not believe it, but Alan has a very deep sense of morality."

"I'll try to believe it," I said. "Do you have the girl's name and address?"

She did, and she gave it to me. A Gina Pastore and a West Los Angeles address. "An Italian girl," she added. "Very beautiful, I've heard."

"Thank you, Miss Adams," I said. "Do you want to tell me who gave you this information?"

A pause, and then, "I'd rather not. I don't think it's important. And there's no point in disturbing any more people than we have to, is there?"

"None," I agreed. "Thank you, again."

3.

The address was a four unit apartment building on National Boulevard, near the Santa Monica airport. The first floor apartment on the right was the home of Gina Pastore.

From behind her door, I thought I could hear the sound of a woman crying. I pressed the bell button and heard the chimes and the crying stopped.

A little later, the door opened. The girl who stood there was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. She was young and dark and attractive, but already showing a touch of the bulk she would grow

into. A little too bosomy, a little too hippy.

"Miss Pastore?" I asked.

She nodded.

"I'm looking for Alan Engle," I told her.

Quick apprehension in her soft, brown eyes. "Why? Has something happened?"

"I don't know," I told her, "except that he's missing."

"Missing — ? Missing from where?"

"From his home. Have you seen him lately?"

She said nothing for seconds, her gaze anxiously on my face. Then she nodded wordlessly.

"When did you see him last?" I asked.

She took a breath and faced me defiantly. "Last night. He stayed here last night. Make what you will of that."

"Do you know where he is now?"

She shook her head. "He left this morning. He was going to meet me for lunch. He didn't. He didn't phone. Do you know where he is, now?"

I shook my head. "That's why I'm here. He was supposed to meet you for lunch, you say, and he didn't?"

She nodded.

I asked gently, "Is that why you were crying?"

She looked at me quietly, saying nothing.

I asked less gently, "You thought

he was running out on you again? You thought you had been conned, again?"

She put a hand on the doorknob, as though to close the door.

"Wait," I said. "I'm better prepared to look for him than you are. Did he stay here night before last, too?"

A pause, and she nodded. "Do you think something could have happened—I mean, maybe he did intend to meet me for lunch and something happened—something—" Her voice began to shake, and she stopped talking.

"It's possible," I said. "May I come in?"

She looked at me doubtfully. "Are you a policeman?"

I showed her the photostat of my license. "Private. I've been looking for Mr. Engle all day. Maybe you know something that would help me to find him."

"I doubt it," she said wearily. "But come in."

I learned that Alan Engle had not only spent the previous night here, but also the night before that. Which meant he must have come here after taking Armine Sandow home from the Shirvanian's party. He'd told Gina that he was finally leaving his wife. He'd also told Gina that they would be married as soon as his divorce would become final.

She'd believed him. Until he hadn't shown up for lunch today. Now, she didn't know what to

believe.

I said, "You knew Mr. Engle years ago, didn't you? Have you been seeing him right along since you first met?"

She shook her head. "He drove into *Baker's*, about a week ago. That's a drive-in on Olympic. That's where I work."

"And that's the first time you saw him since when?"

"That's the first time I saw him in almost six years," she said. "But that doesn't mean he—I mean, it was no cheap pick-up, you understand. He—told me he'd always regretted what happened six years ago."

But he'd made no effort to find her. A thought I didn't voice.

But she did. She said, "He told me he'd wanted to look me up a thousand times. But he thought I hated him."

"I see. And this morning he didn't tell you where he was going?"

She nodded. "He told me he was going home. He was going to tell his wife he wanted a divorce. He was going to tell her everything."

"And that's all he told you? That was the only place he was going?"

She nodded.

"And," I guessed aloud, "you thought his wife might have talked him out of it?"

She nodded more slowly. "Something—like that."

"You know it was his wife who

hired me to find him."

Gina Pastore stared at me and the tears began to gather in her eyes again. Her voice was hoarse. "Where could he be?"

I shrugged.

She sniffed. "He's been — despondent. You don't think he might have —" The tears began to stream.

"No," I said. "I'm sure he's not the type for that. If you'd like, I'll phone you after I check back with Mrs. Engle. She might have some word of him by now."

"Thank you," she said. "That would be kind of you."

I thought of phoning Mrs. Engle, but I wasn't too far from Brentwood, so I drove over.

There was a Department car in front and I parked behind it. I was just getting out, when I saw Mrs. Engle coming down from the house. She was crying. Sergeant Duffy was with her; he's a detective out of Homicide.

There was another detective I knew behind the wheel of the Department car, and I went over there. I asked, "What's happened?"

"Her husband's been killed. We think it's her husband. She's going down to make identification now. What are you doing here, Puma?"

"She hired me to look for him. Where was he killed?"

"We're not sure. But he was found in one of the canyons out in the Palisades." The man frowned. "You'd better come along, Puma."

Duffy and I weren't lodge brothers; we'd had words a few times. He didn't look happy to see me.

Mrs. Engle said softly, "Will you come along with us, Mr. Puma? I need — someone."

"He's coming along," Duffy said gruffly.

She and I got in back; Duffy rode in front with the other officer.

Her voice was choked. "And all the time I thought he was — I'm so ashamed of myself."

I looked out at the heavy traffic. I couldn't think of anything to say. I thought of Miss Adams and the Sandows and the Shirvanians and Gina Pastore. Gina would grieve, too; I wondered about the others.

"He was so attentive lately," Mrs. Engle whispered. "I should have known something had happened. I should have known he hadn't run off—"

There was mascara on her cheeks and her face was puffed. She looked more than forty now. I can bleed for the weak, but not for the maudlin; I felt uncomfortable.

"He was a *good* man," she whispered. "Misunderstood, but a *good* man, just a boy, really—" She began to sob.

In the rear view mirror, Sergeant Duffy's eyes met mine cynically. In the lane to our left, a big diesel went by, fouling the air with exhaust fumes.

The sound of it made me think

of Elizabeth Adams and her cottage near the Highway. I would have to ask her who had told her about Alan going back to the Pastore girl. It was the only lead I could think of.

And if I told Duffy about the Pastore girl, about Alan's living there, who would benefit? Not Gina Pastore and not Mrs. Alan Engle. Justice might, but justice was only a word. The other two were people.

At the West Side Station, Duffy said to the other officer, "You accompany Mrs. Engle." Then he turned to me. "I'll get a stenographer to take your statement."

In a small, bright and airless room, a uniformed stenographer wrote the account of my day as I gave it to him. When I came to Gina Pastore, I mentioned only that she had been the last I know to see him. I didn't mention her story of Alan's staying there.

Duffy had come in before I'd finished dictating and he listened to my recounting of the last two calls of the day.

"You can sign it after it's typed," he said. "Tomorrow will be all right. Ready to go?"

I nodded and stood up. "How was Engle killed?"

"Bludgeoned to death." He studied me. "You're through with this case now, you understand? We don't like peepers messing around in murder cases."

"I understand," I said. "I was

hired to find him. He's been found."

He nodded curtly. "Right. So keep your nose clean and stay in business."

"I'll stay in business," I told him. "And I can do without your insolence, Sergeant."

He considered me for a few seconds. He had the badge, but I had twenty pounds on him. He grunted something and nodded toward the door. He followed me out.

In the car, Mrs. Engle was no longer crying. Her body was rigid and her eyes blank in shock. Her hands trembled in her lap. Sergeant Duffy and his partner sat in front again.

It was after six; the traffic was a shade thinner. Mrs. Engle said hoarsely, "I want you to find the person who did this, Mr. Puma."

Duffy's eyes met mine in the mirror again. I said, "Trained men will be working on it, Mrs. Engle. Men with equipment and the personnel to work around the clock. I wouldn't add much."

"He's dead," she said. "If the police were that good, he wouldn't be dead. I want you to work for me."

Duffy said, "We're going to give it a lot of attention, Mrs. Engle."

Her eyes burned into the back of his head. "I was talking to Mr. Puma, Sergeant. It was a private conversation."

My eyes met Duffy's blandly.

There was a warning in his.

In front of her house, Duffy got out to open the door for us. Mrs. Engle got out first and took a few steps toward the house.

Duffy put a restraining hand on my arm. "Remember what I told you, peeper."

I looked at his hand until he took it away. "I've an excellent memory," I said. I followed Mrs. Engle to the front door.

There, a maid told us the doctor was waiting. And in the living room, the doctor told me that he was giving Mrs. Engle a sedative and wanted her to rest.

She gripped one of my hands in both of hers. "Stay on this. You're working for me. Don't spare any expense."

"All right," I said. "Listen to your doctor, Mrs. Engle. Try to find some peace."

She went out with the doctor and I got the maid's permission to use the phone. I called Elizabeth Adams.

"Have you eaten?" I asked her.

"No. Why?"

"I thought we could pick up a steak somewhere."

A pause, and then, "Are you single, Mr. Puma?"

"I am. And a gentleman."

"Well, then buy a couple," she said, "and I'll broil them here. I'm in jeans and I don't want to get dressed."

"How are you fixed for beer?" I asked.

"I've three cans."

I picked up some beer and a pair of steaks in the Palisades on the way out. I'd promised to phone Miss Pastore, but I was sure that Sergeant Duffy was already there with information about her beloved Alan.

The hills were turning purple, but the sea was still a deep and shining blue under the rays of the western sun. The fishing boats were heading in toward Malibu and the restaurant parking lots were beginning to fill up.

I had to wait a long time for a big enough break in the traffic to permit a U-turn. I pulled off on the sandy shoulder and walked down the steps to the cottage.

4.

Elizabeth Adams was wearing a flared cotton skirt and rawhide sandals and an embroidered peasant blouse.

"Where are the blue jeans?" I asked.

"Blue jeans are for hamburger," she said. "You promised to bring steak."

I handed her the package of meat and took the beer over to the refrigerator. My back was to her when I said, "I've brought bad news."

"So—?"

I turned. "Alan Engle is dead."

She stared at me. "How—when—?"

"He was clubbed to death," I said, "some time today."

The package dropped from her hand and plopped softly on the floor. She seemed to waver, and I came close.

She shook her head. "I'll be all right. Who did it?"

"Nobody knows. Who phoned you to tell you about Gina Pastore?"

She stared silently for seconds. Then, "Did you come here to find out about Alan? Is that why you brought the steaks?"

I shook my head. "I wanted to get some place where I could look at the sea and eat a good steak across from a pretty girl. This seemed to offer the proper combination."

Her eyes probed my face. "You're not lying?"

"No. It's been a bad day. I get a lot of them in my business."

"All right," she said. "All right. Jeff Roeder told me about Alan going back to that Italian girl. He phoned, the snake."

I smiled. "Did you tell him off?"

She shook her head. "I told him I'd go out with him if his wife was going along."

"And how did Alan Engle get into the conversation?"

"That was before Jeff asked for the date. I told him you had been here, doing his old job."

I came over and picked up the steak. I handed her the package and patted her shoulder and said,

"Let's try not to think of Alan Engle. I've had nothing else all day."

"I can't get him out of my mind," she said. "You see, right from the beginning, he was in company too fast for him. He never had a chance."

"He did very well," I said. "He must have made a lot of money since he was nineteen."

"Money," she said scornfully. "Alan left it for his first love, didn't he?"

"I don't know. Neither do you. Shall I open a can of beer for you, too?"

Money... I wondered how long Alan and his slightly over-ripe first love would have got along without it, if he'd been given the chance. Money is only unimportant when you have a bank full of it.

The wind came from the west and we could see Catalina. We could see the lights of the bay and all the stars and the lights of the big birds heading for International Airport.

Elizabeth Adams told me of the perils of modeling, exaggerating some of the stories, I'm sure. And I recounted the perils of my trade, exaggerating a few items, I'm doubly sure.

The steaks were exactly right and the salad exceptional and the beer soon gone. Around ten-thirty, I moved a little closer.

She stood up and went over to put some records on the record

player—for my benefit.

"Don't be annoyed," I said. "I'm just naturally affectionate."

"So am I," she said calmly, "but aren't you crowding things? We only met today." She lighted a cigarette. "I'm not sure I trust you, Joe Puma." She stood next to the record player, appraising me.

I smiled and said nothing.

"You're still on the Alan Engle case, aren't you? I'll bet you're still working for Grace Engle."

"I could be. She wants me to. But that isn't why I'm here. You seem—so different from the other girls a gent runs into out here."

She closed her eyes. "Oh, no. Not that line out of antiquity."

"Seriously," I said. "You're like—Connecticut rain."

"Gawd," she said. "Man, you're reaching."

"So help me. You look New England and washed and in possession of all your faculties and—"

She put up a hand. "And I think it's time to say good night. I've an early call tomorrow."

"Okay," I said. "Do we shake hands or something?" I stood up.

"You may kiss me lightly," she answered. "It was a fine steak you brought."

I kissed her lightly. Her lips were soft and cool and her fragrance cool and clean. I trembled a little, fought the beast in me, and stepped back with a sad smile.

"Good night, Liz. Lot of luck tomorrow."

"You, too," she said. "*You are* single, aren't you?"

I nodded. "Good night."

I was halfway up the steps to the road, when she called, "Joe—?"

I turned, my pulse hammering, and my knees softening. "Yes?"

"Check that Roeder. I've a feeling he's been mixed in some shady business right along."

"I planned to," I told her. "Good night, Liz."

"Good night," she said, and closed the door.

Traffic was sparse on the highway, but moving fast. I pulled over in the right hand lane and just dawdled along. There'd been a Chev Club parked across the road when I'd come out of the cottage; I'd assumed it was the car of some beach picnicker.

At the Topanga Canyon light, I saw it was behind me. In the reflections from oncoming headlights, I could make out only a single male passenger behind the wheel.

I drove along at twenty-five miles an hour, which is equivalent to parking on the Coast Highway. The Chev stayed behind me.

It was a beautiful night and maybe he was enjoying it as I was. At the Sunset intersection, I swung over to the extreme left lane, from which a motorist is permitted only to turn left. The Chev swung in behind me.

Traffic was light, and there were no cops in sight. I went straight

ahead from that lane, breaking the law. The Chev followed.

I cut over to the right again, and ran the flivver up to fifty. The Chev stayed a few blocks behind, but lost no ground. I stopped three blocks this side of the Chautauqua light, and stepped out from the driver's side.

The Chev slowed, and I waved. It pulled in ahead of my car, and I went over.

The man behind the wheel was Dutch Hofmeister. He'd been a wrestler and a tackle for the Fortyniners. He'd been a private operative until he'd lost his license for acting as a go-between in the Sylvester kidnapping.

"What's my attraction, Dutch?" I asked him.

He grinned. "None for me. I was out for the air. That's illegal? I saw your car and thought I'd heckle you."

"You're a liar," I said.

"Easy," he cautioned me. "You're not big enough to talk like that to me."

"Step out and we'll see."

He shook his head and chuckled. "You Latins—so impetuous. How'd you make out at the cottage, Puma?"

"I'm reporting this to Sergeant Duffy when I go in to see him tomorrow," I said. "You can't stand any police attention you know, Dutch."

"Maybe not." He started his motor again. "The sixty-four thou-

sand dollar question is whether *you* can, Puma. You've still got *your* license to lose." He gunned away, his tires throwing up sand from the blacktop.

At home, I stayed in the shower a long time. Then I put on a robe and sat next to the front window, watching the traffic on Wilshire. Dutch Hofmeister could be working for *anybody*, though a responsible citizen wouldn't be likely to hire a man who'd lost his license. Of course, Dutch could also be working for the man he'd always worked for, himself. Maybe he saw a dollar in this case somewhere.

The dry western wind moved through the open window, keeping the night bright, roughening the skin, clearing my sinuses. I went to bed and slept without dreams.

5.

In the small office, Duffy said, "The statement will be here in a minute. This Hofmeister we'll lean on a little." He looked at me levelly. "What were you doing at Miss Adams'?"

"Eating steak and drinking beer and talking. What else?"

"Putting your big nose into this Engle kill, maybe?"

"Not last night. I told her Alan Engle was the last thing I wanted to talk about. What's new on that?"

He looked at me bleakly. "It's all in the morning papers. Pick up a copy."

"What's new that isn't in the papers, Sergeant?"

"Nothing."

"Did you talk to Gina Pastore?"

He nodded. "She was working at the time Engle was killed."

"What time was that?"

"Between eleven and noon yesterday." He took a deep breath and frowned. "And before he was clubbed, he ate a hearty meal. That's what the autopsy showed." His frown deepened. "It's all in the papers."

Then a uniformed man came in with the report I'd dictated yesterday and I signed it. Duffy left while I was signing.

In the hall next to the squad room, Sergeant Hansen was drinking from the bubbler. I'd done him a favor once.

He straightened and smiled and said, "How's your golf, Joe?"

"Lousy. Got time for a cup of coffee, Arnie?"

His smile remained. "Nope. And I don't know anything about the Engle case. And if I did, I sure as hell wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of Duffy. That man's going places in the Department, Joe. He's a fire-ball."

"He's a Mick slant-head," I answered. "And you know it. You've got a short memory, Arnie."

He nodded and sighed. "And a steady job. Life *can* be beautiful."

I used a naughty word and went out into the dry, bright morning. The good men in my trade try to

work with the law but the law persists in making that as difficult as possible. I suppose, if the law were perfect, I'd be out of business, though. On this current quest I was getting nowhere, but I had a feeling Duffy wasn't doing much better, despite the air of competence he had developed to impress his superiors.

I ate breakfast at *Zukie's* and drove over to the impressive suite of offices on Wilshire known as *The Roeder Agency*.

A lacquered blonde in the reception room informed me that Mr. Roeder would be free in a few minutes. I sat and leafed through a copy of *Fortune* while I waited.

Jeff had the front one needs to get the carriage trade. Before he'd married money, his office had been as crummy as mine.

In about five minutes, he came out of his office with his hand on Al Lederman's shoulder. He said, "Discretion on this one, you know, Al. The velvet glove. *These* are important people."

Al seemed a little uncomfortable. "I understand," he said. "I've handled this sort of thing before, boss."

I thought Al had put an ironic touch on that last word. He saw me and came over to shake my hand. Jeff said, "With you in a minute, Joe." He went back into his office and closed the door.

Al sighed. I said, "So big. So very, very big."

Al nodded. "And attractive to women, too. How's it going, Joe?"

"All right. I'm free and hungry."

"Couldn't use a partner with twelve hundred in cash, could you?"

I shook my head. "There isn't that much work. Our boy has really gone Hollywood, hasn't he?"

Al's eyebrows lifted. "Wait'll you get a whiff of his new cologne. See you around, Joe."

The lacquered blonde said, "Mr. Roeder will see you now, Mr. Puma."

Jeff's office was gray and silver, with a splash of brighter color here and there. Some Hopper reproductions were on the walls.

Jeff asked, "Business this morning, Joe?"

"You smell good enough to date," I said, "but alas, it's business." I paused. "The Engle business."

He frowned. "Unfortunate, that."

"Let's take it over from the top," I said. "The part doesn't call for an English accent."

Some malice in his gray eyes. "All right, Joe. What are you here for?"

"First, I'd like to know when Dutch Hofmeister went on your payroll."

"Never. What makes you think I'd hire a bum like that?"

"Just a hunch. Second, how come Mrs. Engle didn't call you in again to find her husband this last time?"

"I've no idea. Any more ques-

tions you want to ask me?"

"One more. Why didn't you tell Elizabeth Adams you were married?"

He smiled. "Would you, if you were married? And why did you tell her I was?"

"Because she's too nice a girl to get mixed up with a phoney philanderer."

The gray eyes glinted. "Don't let my tailoring lead you astray, Joe. I'm not a boy you want to buck."

"Yes, you are. I'd like to do it for a living. Jeff, if you know something I should, it could be a good time to sell me. I'm staying with this case."

His smile was scornful. "Duffy will be pleased to hear that." He expelled his breath. "Well, I've a full morning. Good luck."

I nodded and went out past the blonde and the pretty prints and down in the self-service elevator to the ground floor. The morning traffic glittered along Wilshire and there was a Chev Club parked about four cars back of mine.

Jeff hadn't been much worse than a genial swindler before he'd married money. Now, he had no other loyalty. And Arnie Hansen's loyalty was to his job, which represented his kind of money. It was a bad town for loyalty to *people*.

Something stirred in my unconscious and evaporated. I sat in the flivver, waiting to see who would climb into the Chev Club behind.

A matron in a Cadillac looking for a parking space came abreast of me and looked at me quizzically. I shook my head and she drove on, frowning.

In five minutes, a thin man carrying a brief case came out from a store and climbed into the Chev. This town is full of Chev Clubs.

At my office, my phone answering service reported no calls since I'd last checked it. I took out my reports of the day before and tried to think of any comments I'd missed putting down.

Nothing, nothing, nothing...I typed up today's visit with Duffy and with Roeder in my efficient, two-fingered way.

I phoned Gina Pastore and waited while her phone rang five times. Her voice was blurred and thick.

"This is Joseph Puma," I said.

"The private detective? The police told me not to talk to you, Mr. Puma. They told me it will go a lot easier on me if I co-operate with them."

"I won't tell them. I thought there might have been something you neglected to tell me yesterday. I'm working on this case, too, Miss Pastore."

"I don't want any trouble," she said. "I might even lose my job because I stayed home today. I can't afford any trouble."

I started to say more, but the line went dead. I looked up Mrs. Engle's unlisted number in my

card file and dialed that.

The maid told me Mrs. Engle was still sleeping. She had been given another sedative by the doctor late last night.

Well, where was a thread I might unravel? A husband seemed like a good bet if Alan's feminine conquests had been physical as well as spiritual.

I drove out to the Sandows. Felix wasn't on the front lawn today; Armine was pruning the lemon tree in the side yard.

"Hello, again," I said.

She put the clippers down and took off the heavy gloves she was wearing. "Let's go around to the patio. It's cooler on that side of the house."

The patio was red brick, framed in roses. She went over to a portable bar. "There's no ice, but I can get some from the house. Would you like a drink?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I suppose you were shocked by what happened."

She came back to sit on the end of a redwood bench. "We all were. Is there anything new on it this morning?"

"Not that I've been told about. You know, the logical suspect would be a husband, wouldn't it?"

Her thin body was still. Her dark eyes considered me gravely. "I hope you weren't thinking of Felix?"

"Just—husbands generally."

She looked past me. "Felix isn't—emotional. He's extremely civi-

lized." She looked at me. "Were you thinking of Felix? The police didn't indicate that they were."

"The police aren't sensitive," I said. "Did you love Alan Engle?"

She shrugged. "Everybody loved Alan. I wouldn't say he had an unusual physical appeal, though."

"Your husband thinks he had."

"I meant for me," she said quietly. "I guess he had plenty of physical attraction for some—kind of women."

"What kind?"

"The physical kind. Are you sure you don't want a drink? I'd like an excuse for not working this morning."

"Anything to oblige a lady," I said. "Something with gin in it."

When she came back with a silver bucket of ice, I asked, "Do you know Jeff Roeder?"

"Only through his professional visits. I know that friend of his though, that Elizabeth Adams. A lovely girl."

"She certainly is," I agreed. "Is your husband around this morning?"

She shook her head. "He had to go into Hollywood on some scheme of his." She came over to hand me a drink. "You're not seriously considering Felix as a suspect, are you?" "Not seriously. Was he here between eleven and noon yesterday?"

She nodded. "Right where you found him, on the front lawn, soaking in the sun and alcohol." She sat down and sipped her drink.

"Felix can now afford to be merely ornamental; my pictures are beginning to bring fine prices."

Nothing from me.

She said, "I hope that didn't sound bitter. I'm quite content."

I asked, "Does your husband paint, too?"

She nodded. "Only when the mood moves him and *never* for the market. Please don't misjudge him; he's an amusing and frequently gentle man and worth every nickel he costs me."

I thought of Grace Engle and sipped my drink. I said, "Alan planned to marry that Pastore girl. You knew he'd gone back to her, didn't you?"

Her eyes widened. "I didn't. I haven't seen a paper. How were they going to live?"

"She had a job at a drive-in," I said. "I guess some of those girls make out pretty well, what with tips and all."

Armine Sandow smiled, and then she laughed. Suddenly she stopped.

Her voice was tight. "I shouldn't laugh, should I? Not with Alan dead. But this absurd, this monstrous trinity. I mean, Grace and Alan and Felix and me and then Alan and this other girl. A matriarchate—that's where this civilization is heading."

"I'll vote for it," I said. "Why else would Alan die, if we eliminate husbands?"

"I've no idea," she said. "The

Turks used to kill us just for the sport, but there are no Turks in this, are there?"

"None. Do you know Grace Engle very well?"

She shook her head. "She didn't mix much with our gang. But speaking of wealthy wives, didn't that Roeder person have one, too?"

"I've just come from his office," I said. "I feel he has a place in the picture, somewhere, but it's mostly hunch. Did Alan ever have any trouble with anybody in this—gang of yours?"

She looked thoughtful. "I can't remember any time. I think, though, that you can eliminate husbands as suspects. I can't think of any husbands in the gang who take that drastic a view of adultery."

"And if we eliminate jealousy, we come to money. How does your gang feel about that?"

She smiled. "Most of them take a very casual view of it. But—maybe this Pastore girl had a new boy friend? It's quite possible she could have one with middle class views on morality."

"It's possible," I agreed and looked at her levelly. "You've come a long way from the grape-picking days, haven't you?"

She colored slightly. "I suppose I did sound a little pretentious. To answer your question, yes, I'm a long way from Fresno." She paused, and met my glance defiantly. "*Artistically*, too."

I stood up. "Okay. I guess I was rude. I apologize, if I was. There's absolutely nothing you can tell me that might help?"

"Nothing," she said wearily. "Alan was well-loved."

I went down the hill again thinking of her last words. Well-loved he apparently had been. But not well-heeled. Eliminating hate and greed, what was left for motive? A murder needs a motive. Lacking a motive, its only manslaughter.

Well-loved, usually, also implies well-hated. The same quality in one person inspires love in some and hate in others. And there was no reason to limit my suspicion to Alan's closest friends.

6.

I drove over to the four unit apartment building near the Santa Monica Airport. A block away, I thought I saw a Chev Club parked and it looked as though someone was behind the wheel. But the car was in the shade of a huge eucalyptus tree, and I couldn't be sure from this distance.

After my fourth ring, Gina Pastore came to the door. Her face was puffed and her eyes red-rimmed; she looked twenty years older.

"I'm not supposed to talk to you," she said, and started to close the door.

I put the palm of my hand against it. "I work for a living, like

you do, Miss Pastore. I'm trying to earn my living. The police can give only a fraction of their time to investigating his death. It's my entire job and I need all the help I can get. Don't you want to help? Wasn't he important to you?"

"I want to help," she said sullenly. "But I don't want trouble. And how do I know Mrs. Engle didn't hire you to shut me up?"

"Mrs. Engle loved him," I told her gently. "She took a lot of abuse from him."

Her eyes flared. "She bought him. His body, that's what she wanted. Well, she's got it, now."

"You're being unkind," I said. "And foolish. You have to believe in *somebody*, Miss Pastore."

Her haggard eyes studied me listlessly. She took a deep breath, and finally said, "All right, come in, come in."

There was a musty, wine-tinged odor in the living room. All the shades were drawn and the room was dim. The morning papers were scattered all over the davenport. A girdle was draped over the arm of an occasional chair.

I pushed the papers to one side and sat on the davenport. I said, "When Alan left you yesterday morning, your understanding was that he was going directly to see Mrs. Engle?"

She nodded.

"He was going to ask for a divorce so he could marry you?"

She seemed suddenly frightened

and whispered, "That's right."

"You were going to keep your job?"

She looked at me suspiciously. "What's that got to do with it?"

"I wondered how you were going to live. Alan had no income of his own, did he?"

Her face stiffened. "He always had money. Why, when he was only nineteen years old, he was making over two hundred dollars a week."

"In radio," I reminded her. "There have been some changes in radio, since then. He lived high, probably."

She shook her head. "He was no spendthrift. He watched his money. He didn't need to spend *his* money, after he married that old woman."

"This is a new angle," I said. "I had an idea, somehow, he was a high-flying bird."

"He wasn't cheap," she said. "But he wasn't foolish, either." Her body shook and she began to cry.

I asked, "Has another detective, a man named Jeff Roeder, come to see you?"

She shook her head without looking up. "There was a detective, but that wasn't his name. A big man. I don't remember his name. He—drove a Chevrolet, a gray one."

"Hofmeister?"

She shook her head. "Wait. It was Abbott, Lewis Abbott."

"Recently?"

"This morning. Do you know him?"

"I *knew* him. He's been dead for two years."

She lifted her head to stare at me. There was fright in her wet eyes.

I said, "It's probably a man named Hofmeister. He isn't licensed any more and he gave you a phoney name. Would you say he was heavier than two hundred pounds?"

She nodded. "He could have been fifty pounds heavier than that. Who is he? What does he want?"

"He's a crook," I answered. "I'm not sure what he wants. You should have told the police about him."

Her soft body was tense now. "You don't think—Could he have had something to do with Alan's murder?"

"He could be working for the person who killed Alan. Or maybe he even did it himself."

"But why should he? What was he following us for?"

"What do you mean, following?" I said sharply. "You didn't mention that."

"I'm not really sure about it. It's just a feeling I have. There was a car like his parked outside the night—the night Alan came here. The next night, too. I never gave it any thought, until now that—"

"Wait a minute." I was thinking fast. "Maybe that's Hofmeister's

angle. Blackmail."

She gasped, like someone dropped in cold water.

"It's exactly his kind of dodge. Maybe he thought there was a buck to be made, trailing Mrs. Engle's wandering boy. And when he saw him shack up here, maybe he put the arm on Alan for money. Could be Alan wouldn't give."

"Maybe they had an argument!" Gina's big eyes were bigger. "And then—"

"Look," I said, "could you recognize him if the police picked him up?"

She nodded. "I'm sure I could. Will you phone the police? Will you tell them about this man right now?"

I said, "There's a possibility he's only a block away from here this minute. Sit tight; I'll be right back."

I went to the door, intending to go out to the sidewalk, but there was no need to do that. The Chev Club was parked across the street and there was somebody behind the wheel. I beckoned him.

Gina Pastore came to the door, and she said, "That's the same kind of car. But there are a lot of them. We get them at the drive-in every day."

A man was getting out from the driver's side now, a big man. He waited for traffic to pass; and then came across the street.

Gina Pastore said doubtfully, "That could be him." And as he

drew closer, "That's him, that's him."

I said, "Lock the door," and went down the walk to meet Dutch Hofmeister.

He was smiling.

"Need some help, buddy?"

I shook my head. "Lewis Abbott is dead, Dutch."

He continued to smile. "So?"

"You used his name."

"Like hell. Who said so?"

"Miss Pastore."

He was no longer smiling. "She lied."

I shook my head. "Who are you working for, Hofmeister?"

"For Douglas Aircraft, nights. Not that it's any of your damned business, Puma."

"The police will be interested to know you used Abbott's name and were bothering a material witness in a murder case."

"Huh," he said. "Are you trying to frighten me? You already told Duffy about last night, and here I am, free as a bird. Do me something, Dago."

"Easy, Dutch," I warned him. "You're not that big. Nobody is."

He smiled. "I'm scared. You and your paisan friend are cooking up a frame for little Dutch, huh?"

"I'm going in right now to phone the police," I said. "Do you want to wait for them?"

He stood without moving a muscle. "I ought to paste you one. I just might."

"Please do," I said. "Please?"

"I'd slaughter you," he said.

I nodded. "Maybe. One thing you want to remember, Dutch, your strength is all below the neck. If you're smart, you'll come clean before things start getting tough."

He looked at me scornfully. "To hell with you. Go ahead, phone the Department. And then try to explain what *you* were doing here."

He snorted and gave me his broad back to look at as he went back to his car. I watched him drive off.

In the apartment, I told Gina Pastore, "Phone Sergeant Duffy and tell him a man named Hofmeister approached you under the name of Lewis Abbott and tried to question you about Alan's death."

She phoned the west side station and was told Sergeant Duffy was not in. She looked questioningly at me.

I said, "Ask if his partner is there. Tell them it's about the Engle murder case."

She did that. There was a pause. Then another man must have come on, and she repeated what I'd told her to tell them.

Another pause, and she looked at me. "He wants to know how I know the man's name is really Hofmeister."

"Tell him he used to be a customer at your drive-in."

She told the officer that and again looked at me. "He wants to know who is here now."

"Tell him the milkman."

She took a deep breath. "Nobody's here now. But I'm afraid that that man might come back — and kill me, too. Don't I get any protection?" A pause. "All right. I'll wait. But tell whoever comes to park right in front, so I can see his car through the window."

She hung up and said, "They're sending a detective over."

"I'll go," I said. "He should be here in a few minutes. You won't be frightened, will you?"

She shook her head. "I'm not frightened. I'm just—tired." She looked towards the open door of the bedroom. For the first time, I noticed the cheap, imitation-alligator valise on the floor, with the pink look of a bra sticking out of the side. "I thought I'd go away for a week or so," she said. "To my sister in Frisco."

"Good idea. Only you don't pack so good, honey."

She looked at the valise and smiled. Then she was serious, and her brown eyes moved over my face. "Are you Italian?"

I nodded. "Paisan. Chin up, kid."

"I should have known I could trust you. I'm sorry I didn't."

"Don't fret," I said. "Most intelligent people don't. And you're still a young and very attractive girl, Gina. Keep that in mind. The world hasn't come to an end."

"I'm going to be a horse," she said. "A cow. My mother weighs almost two hundred pounds."

I patted her cheek. "A little less lasagna and little more massage. You're all woman, honey, and that's the important thing."

She managed one small, sad smile before I left.

7.

I got out of there thinking about things like love and money, wondering which force would be stronger in getting somebody to commit murder. Thinking about money brought Armine Sandow's comment to mind. "*Our gang takes a very casual view of money...*"

But Alan Engle's view wasn't casual. Neither was Dutch Hofmeister's. He sure wasn't running up mileage on that Chevy of his for fun.

On nothing but hunch, I steered the car back into the hills, on a repeat visit to the Sandows.

Armine must have gotten tired of pruning chores. She was stretched out on the slats of a redwood bench, and there was a glass beside her on the patio that looked like it had been emptied more than once. She looked up when the flivver took the driveway, shielding her eyes against a sun that was hanging fat and red over the bay.

"I knew you couldn't stay away." She laughed, a little shrilly I thought.

I got out of the car. "Mr. Sandow still in Hollywood?"

"Yes. It's an all day scheme he's working on. All night, too, most likely." She sat up and brushed back her hair. Then she reached for the glass, and frowned when she saw it was empty.

"All night?" I said.

"Listen, Mr. Puma." Her voice was testy. "I merely said Felix was civilized. I didn't say he was docile."

I thought about that for a few seconds. Then I said, "I just paid a call on Gina Pastore. You were right about her, Mrs. Sandow. She's a beautiful gal."

She snorted. "That's Alan for you. A great man for variety, Alan. A real democratic lover..."

Whatever had once been in the glass had obviously loosened her tongue. I saw this as opportunity.

"I don't quite get you," I said.

"Bless 'em all," she giggled. "Bless 'em all. The short and the fat and the tall—"

"You mean Alan went for all types?"

"Types? Say, do you know what Alan's type was? Two legs, two arms, two eyes, two—" She completed a bawdy description.

I didn't say anything for a while after that and neither did she. Finally, she arose with a fatigued sigh and put her shoulders far back as part of stretching.

"Don't get Alan wrong," she said, speaking softly now, almost tenderly. "He had real sensitivity.

He could talk about painting, and make sense. And he could be real sweet sometimes. Real sweet. You know how he was on radio? Yes, of course you do. He had a voice like—" She looked at the water, her eyes distant. "I don't know how to describe it. Oh, did you ever take a good thick lotion and just let it slide over your skin after a shower? That's what Alan's voice was like. Really."

I cleared my throat, but not to interrupt.

"Sometimes," she said dreamily, "we used to sit out here at night and just look at the moon. Sounds corny, doesn't it? But it didn't *feel* corny. Not when Alan was here. He'd talk, and I'd listen. God knows, I couldn't repeat a word he used to say. I'd never really listen to the words; just to his voice, pouring over me..."

"And where was Felix during all this?"

I thought the remark would strike fire, but she just shrugged. Then I got an intuitive itch, and scratched it.

"And what about Gina?" I said. "Did he ever talk to you about her?"

That did it. Emotion flashed in her face, the like of which I'd never seen there before.

"That two-bit Lollobrigida!" she exclaimed. "That Italian whore! *She* couldn't have given him anything. Nothing more than a good—"

I played my trump. "You hated, Gina, didn't you? Even more than you hated Grace Engle. *She* was your real threat — not Alan's wife. Isn't that so? Am I right?"

"Get out of here!"

"You were the last person to see Alan before he went trouncing off to Gina's loving arms, weren't you? Maybe you knew where he was going. Maybe he passed up your own fourposter for hers and —"

"Get out!" It was a shriek.

"You could have followed Alan. And have built up enough steam to want to kill him. Right?"

She stood up. The spirit had gone out of her.

"Right?" I prodded.

"I *was* sore enough," she said. "Haven't *you* ever gotten that sore? Haven't *you* ever thought you could kill?"

"Did you follow Alan after he took you home that night?"

She nodded. "Yes. But I didn't—"

"What kind of a car do you drive?"

"What?"

"What kind of car?"

"A Buick."

"What color?"

"A two-tone. Tan and green."

"How close did you get to Gina Pastore's apartment house?"

"I just drove up and down in front of it. Then I parked across the street and just waited. God knows what for."

"Did anybody else drive up that

night?" I asked her.

She shook her head.

"Be sure about this," I said. "Was any other car parked outside? With somebody in it?"

"No. All I could see was Alan's car. A Jaguar."

"How long were you there?"

"I don't know. Practically until dawn. It was almost four o'clock by the time Alan left me. The Shirvanians like late parties."

I started digging in my pocket for the car keys. "Okay, Mrs. Sandow. I better get going."

"Wait." She came over and her thin hand started kneading my coat sleeve. "It's getting late," she said. "Do you have dinner plans? I hate eating alone."

"Sorry. Got to see a man."

"Tomorrow's another day. And I cook, too. Believe it or not. With my own hands."

She was bending over me, and so close that you couldn't tell how thin she was. What do they say about gray cats?

"Really," I said. "I've got an errand. I'm still on Grace Engle's payroll, you know."

"You have a fine head." She was trailing her fingers over my hair. "Such good Latin bones. I'd like to do a portrait sometimes."

"Your price is too steep."

"I give discounts," she said, "for prompt payment."

I got out from under, and turned my back on her.

"Some other time," I said.

I climbed in the car, and spun the wheel until I was pointed down the hill. I could feel her eyes on me until I hit the highway.

8.

I had that *almost* feeling now. That nagging, nuisance-type feeling that the round pegs were *almost* in their round holes.

At least, I knew where to hit next.

Dutch Hofmeister's.

His crummy apartment wasn't more than half a mile away. I stopped off at *Bess Eiler's* and had some lunch. Then I drove over to the weather-beaten, rectangular stucco building of eight units, four to a floor. Dutch's Chev was sitting outside.

I went up the bare stairs and down the hall to his door. I rang the bell.

Silence for seconds, and then his gruff, "Who's there?"

"Puma," I said. "Don't cringe, Dutch."

He opened the door a crack. I could just see the end of his davenport-bed and the open suitcase on it.

"Leaving town?" I asked.

"Beat it," he said. "I got business in Phoenix."

"I think you'd better hang around. The law will be looking for you. Miss Pastore phoned

them less than an hour ago."

He glared. "Puma, for your sake, you'd better be lying. Tell me straight now, you didn't have that wop girl friend of yours phone the law, did you?"

"I certainly did have her do it. And don't use the word 'wop' when I'm around, you crook."

"Why not?" he said, and opened the door wide.

He wasn't fast, but he had plenty of time to put one of his ham-like fists about three inches into my belly. Nausea swelled in me, and I tasted bile in my mouth. He'd sent me back against the opposite wall of the hall, and I bounced off that and into him again.

He hadn't expected me. His second punch whistled past my neck, and he went stumbling into his apartment.

I heard a door open down the hall and the excited voice of a woman, but I gave all my attention to the work at hand.

My right elbow was in front of his face; I swung it savagely into his nose. He grunted and pushed me off and started a haymaker from his hip. I hit him with a nice clean left hand going away and the swish of his haymaker only grazed my ear. I moved to my right, away from his big right hand. I was glad to see his nose bleeding from my elbow work; it proved he wasn't invulnerable.

He was not only vulnerable, but extremely clumsy. He drew back

the right hand again. And I hit him three times in the face while his right was getting under way. He went down with a thump and somebody squealed from the direction of the doorway.

I turned to face a thin, dark-haired woman in a soiled kimona. She stared at me, frightened, momentarily speechless.

I said very calmly though out of breath, "Will you kindly phone the police immediately? They're looking for this man and he was trying to leave town."

She nodded nervously and hurried away down the hall. I knelt beside the motionless slob and reached for his wallet. There was a thick pile of bills in it, and they all looked like twenties. I made a rapid count. It wasn't big money, not in the Bel Air sense, but it was two hundred and forty bucks, which was probably more than Dutch Hofmeister had been toting for a long, long time.

I went over to the bed and looked down at the open suitcase. It had really been packed in a hurry. There were a couple of fancy shirts, both with grimy collars, with a monogrammed H under the pockets. There was one suit, right out of a Fresno bargain emporium, with widely separated chalk stripes. Some underwear and stuff were rolled up Army style. And there was a tin box with faded lettering on all four sides.

I pulled out the box. Maybe it

once held cookies. It was about eight inches high, and it weighed about a million pounds. I almost dropped it in surprise.

Then I pried off the lid and dumped the contents on the bed. I got a kick out of seeing the shining Niagara of halves and quarters and nickels and dimes, the kick a kid gets when he smashes his piggy bank. Only this was a big piggy. This was a rich piggy, with maybe a hundred and fifty bucks in small change.

I scratched my head as I looked down at this jackpot and then started shoveling the coins back into the tin box.

Then that *almost* feeling went away.

Because I had the whole thing pinned down now, with every little peg right where it belonged.

Now all I had to do was ask one more question.

9.

The sun was starting to dunk itself in the bay when I reached the apartment building near the Santa Monica Airport.

There was a black sedan parked outside, and it didn't have to be labeled "Cop", for anybody to identify it as "Cop." I didn't know the driver, so maybe he didn't know me.

I went inside, pausing at the

entrance to scrap some imaginary crud off my shoe, to allow Gina's "protection" to get a real good look at me. What the hell, I can cooperate with the law sometimes.

Gina was wearing something called a traveling suit. It was a shame, too, because her soft curves weren't displayed to best effect. But I hadn't come to pick her wardrobe.

"Mr. Pumal" she said, looking big-eyed.

"Paisan," I grinned. "How's it going?"

"All right, I suppose. What's happened? Have they picked up that man yet?"

"Somebody's picking him up all right," I said. "Literally."

"Do they—do they think he killed Alan?"

"That's hard to say." I took a seat, and glanced towards the bedroom. The valise was still there, with its pink loop between the crack. "You still pack a lousy suitcase," I said.

"Oh, oh I didn't get around to—"

"I saw another suitcase today. It was packed lousy, too. So you're not the only one, Gina." I lit a cigarette, and offered her one. She shook her head.

"For one thing," I said lightly, "this lousy packer really carries money around in a strange way. Like this." I brought the tin box out from behind my back, and jiggled it.

Her whole face got alarmed

when she saw the box, and she whispered something like "*Dios!*" Then she was after it, her red-tipped fingers coming for the box like the claws of a predatory bird. I pulled it away just in time.

"Uh-uh," I said. "This is somebody else's dough, baby. A fellow named Hofmeister —"

"Give it to me!"

"Sorry, paisan. This little piggy goes to the cops."

"It's mine!" she shouted, her eyes burning.

"I know it is. It's all the tips you've been getting at *Baker's*. Right? It's plain you've been saving your dough like a nice girl. Only you shouldn't have given it away, Gina. Not to a creep like Dutch Hofmeister."

"He stole it! He stole it from me!"

I shook my head. "No, Gina. You gave it to him. And you gave him more dough than this, the folding kind. You gave him every nickel and dime you could. There must have been a reason, Gina."

"He—he was blackmailing Alan. I told you that. I—I wanted to help."

"Uh-uh. That won't wash. You couldn't care less if Alan's wife knew about you. That's what you wanted. You wanted Alan to tell her."

She sagged against the back of the davenport.

"No, paisan," I said. "You were paying Hofmeister. Now, why?"

What for? To kill Alan?"

"No!"

"Then why?"

"To find out!" she said. "Only to find out for me!" I put on a puzzled look, until she went on. "He—he told me he was a private detective. I used to see him around the drive-in. He told me he was a private detective named Abbott. Then—when I met Alan again, and he swore that he would divorce his wife and marry me—"

"That's a switch," I said. "You hire a private eye to trail the husband—to see if he's faithful to his wife."

She didn't think it was funny. "I had to *know*! I couldn't stand it if he was lying to me again—just like the last time—" She began to sob, but I didn't have time to get sympathetic. The cop outside would have reported my description to headquarters by now, and Duffy would soon be descending on the apartment house.

"Go on," I said softly, "get it off your chest, Gina."

"He—he began to follow Alan. But he wasn't here the night after the party. I just made that up."

I said, "I know. I already found that out."

"Then he came here once, and—" She stopped, and the sobs took over again.

"Come on," I said. "Cut that out."

"He told me Alan was lying. That all Alan wanted was just to

have a little more—a little more fun with me. That he didn't really intend to marry me."

"How much did you pay this creep for his services?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Then how did he get the rest?"

She compressed her lips as though she'd never speak again. "Answer my question," I told her and, incidentally, let her see my doubled-up fist.

"Well, after he told me that about Alan—he went away. But he didn't stop following us. The other day, I asked Alan to take me out on a picnic, to the canyon. Him and me, just the two of us. I said I'd get the morning off. I had one of my girl friends fill in for me at the drive-in. In those fancy uniforms, it's hard to tell us apart."

"And your girl friend never told the police?"

"She didn't know what it was all about. No, she didn't tell them. She just thought the boss was checking up on me—trying to get me fired."

"So you went on your picnic?"

"We went all right. I—still didn't want to believe Alan was just—using me." She lowered her eyes, her mouth turned down at the corners, and let out a long sigh. "He made love to me, up there. Turned away afterwards and—and went to sleep. Just like I was some animal..." Her hand tightened on the arm of the davenport. "I picked up a rock then and—"

She stopped talking right there, and didn't resume for what seemed like an awfully long time.

Then she said, her voice a despairing monotone, "Hofmeister had followed us. And he saw what happened. When I got home, he was waiting for me. He took every cent I had—even the tip money I'd been saving for a trip I wanted to take to Frisco. But he still wasn't satisfied. He made me say I'd go away with him. Today." She shivered. "He's like a—a—Oh, God, what difference does anything make? Nothing matters. Not now. Nothing—"

I gave her a cigarette, and she puffed away hard at it and sobbed. Finally, Duffy's big fists were making noises on the door.

Duffy was sore as hell, just on general principles, for the first five minutes. Then Gina talked some more, dry-eyed now, without emotion. By the time she was through, Duffy was shaking his head and thinking thoughts obviously not fit for the record.

Arnie Hansen had accompanied Duffy from the station. He took Gina down to the official car parked out front, but not before he had dropped me a congratulatory wink.

"I suppose you're proud of yourself," Duffy grunted, when the room was cleared.

"Hell, no," I said, and I meant it. "There's a lot of guys ought to be hit with rocks. It's just too bad a nice bambino like this one had to do it."

"We picked up Hofmeister," the Sergeant said. "I don't think we'll have any trouble with him."

"Good."

We went down the stairs together, and when we hit the street, the sun was making one last splash before dropping behind the watery horizon. It was a beautiful sight, and I began to feel philosophical.

"You know, Duffy," I said. "It wasn't love or money, after all. There are other motives for murder, apparently. This time it was pride—just plain, old-fashioned, eternal womanly pride."

"Hell hath no fury," he growled as he climbed into the car, "Like a woman scorned."

"Why, Sergeant!" I said, laughing. "You're a goddam poet!"

He told me to do something that was biologically impossible. Then the car drove off, and I could swear I caught a glimpse of the big Irishman grinning.

I got into my own flivver, and I knew what came next. I was going to see Elizabeth Adams. I'd pick up some beer on the way. And this time, I hoped I might stay a little longer.



His father was a stern and exacting tutor. Still, any apprentice assassin might be shaky first time out . . .



Lesson in Murder

BY WALLY HUNTER

THIS was the night for which Vermi had waited. Next to the night Nardio was born, this was the biggest in Vermi's life. Tonight Nardio would fulfill the promise, would take into the dark streets the patiently learned skills, skills acquired under Vermi's painstaking instruction.

Vermi sighed. It took so long. "But, it was worth it," he thought exaltedly. Nardio was a true craftsman. Nearly as good as his father. There was just the simple matter of the final test. Nardio would handle that nicely. He had everything, but mainly the youth and the wondrous reflexes.

"Ah, that I still had them," Vermi thought. "Still, it is not bad when one has a son. To lose them and not have a son is the sad thing."

Nardio was at the door now, ready to go. Dressed in dark clothing, he looked as deadly as the hand-crafted knife concealed beneath his blouse. A little white in the face, perhaps, but deadly.

"You are very good, Nardio," Vermi said. "Do not be nervous. A little excitement, yes, but not nervousness." The boy nodded.

Nardio was 18, but looked younger. His hair, thick and dark, started well down his forehead, leaving only a narrow strip of olive skin above the eyes, giving the impression he was in deep concentration even when he slept. Now his long pianist's fingers drifted lightly over his clothing, touching a button here, flicking at a cuff, tugging at a loose thread and floating away. Vermi watched these flying hands thoughtfully.

"It is nothing," he thought. Aloud, he said. "You are ready now?" Nardio nodded.

"You have the address?" Nardio nodded again.

"Tell me once more what he looks like, this Pihos, the man you are to see."

"He is tall," the boy said tonelessly, "taller than either you or I." He is about 40 years old. This is Friday and he will have a fresh haircut. A red birthmark will run

from the bridge of his nose under his right eye—"

"Enough . . . enough" Vermi said. "Where will you find him?"

Nardio said, "He will be in his room." He mumbled the address.

"Good! Good! Excellent," Vermi said. "And how will you know you have the right man?" He leaned forward to study the boy's face.

Nardio said, "When I clamp his mouth shut and bring back his head, I will see the birthmark."

"Very good. You remember it all." He threw an arm around the boy's shoulders, felt with satisfaction, the long, clean muscles of back and arm. "You are better than I was at the same age," he said soberly. "Of course, by your age, I had earned two commissions. But," he waved his hand, "that is of no consequence. Times are different. There was greater need then for a man of these skills."

Vermi studied the toe of his shoe, wondering if there were more he could say. He could think of nothing.

"Go now," he said suddenly, slapping the boy's shoulder. "And make haste to return!" Nardio slipped through the door.

For the first few minutes after Nardio's departure, Vermi prowled the flat in his peculiar gait like a worried brown bear. Rubbing his bald head, stopping at intervals to listen, his little eyes bright and sharp, Vermi felt that he was as nervous as an expectant father.

"That's exactly what it's like!" Vermi said, slapping his fist into his palm. "I am about to become a father again!" The thought relaxed his tense muscles and he eased into the big easy chair opposite the door. He rubbed the over-stuffed arms, stopping to finger a torn spot where the sweat-dirtied cotton oozed out.

"This has been a long struggle," he thought. Vermi looked around the room. He closed his eyes, remembering where every table and chair stood. That's how the training had started. When Nardio was just five, they'd started. At that age, it was a game, a great game. With the lights out, Nardio had stumbled through the dark, searching for his father.

"You must be quiet," Vermi warned, gliding through the dark, avoiding the small, stumbling figure. "If I hear you, you'll never catch me."

As he grew better, Nardio moved silently through the rooms like a wraith, avoiding furniture and obstacles placed in his path by Vermi. Finally he was given a knife and the hard work started. It was easy enough to teach him to move silently in the dark, but the knife work was different. But the boy learned.

When he was 12, Nardio could move quickly through the darkened room and, guided only by Vermi's breathing, deftly jab a sharp object into any one of the

dozen soft, unprotected spots on a man's body.

Vermi knew by the sure, sharp way that Nardio struck that a knife in the boy's hand would have meant, sudden, silent death. During the latter stages, while they waited only for Nardio to attain growth, Vermi talked constantly of his work.

"It is a good trade," Vermi said soberly. "We will be able to handle twice the work when you are able to go out." Vermi thought of this fondly.

"Yes," Vermi told himself, "for one so young, he is very good." Vermi's brow furrowed. What if the boy did not show the eagerness that was so necessary for one of this profession? Vermi remembered the boy's reluctance when he had first explained how the skills were to be employed. Nardio had looked on the entire idea with repugnance.

Vermi won him over, finally. "You must regard a night's work as merely a business transaction. Nothing more. Sentiment is for the others, not you. You are a machine. You are the son of Vermi!" Now Vermi had difficulty containing his nervousness. He was restless, uneasy. He thought about the boy and the man he was to kill.

"Perhaps," Vermi thought, "I should have encouraged him to try a lesser man first." He considered this, a recent conversation with

Nardio fresh in his mind.

"One thing we face," Vermi said, "is competition. There are others who would take our commissions. This must not be."

"What can we do, father?" Nardio asked.

"We can work better than they!" Vermi said emphatically. "We can do the work better and faster. We can build trust in our ability." He smiled. "You are too young to appreciate this fact, but I, your father, am considered the very best available." He chuckled. "It is true."

Nardio started to speak, but Vermi hushed him. "In this area there is Guiseppe, Pihos, and Martinelli," Vermi ticked them off on his fingers. "They are all good men. I think Pihos is the best." He studied the ceiling. "Yes, it would be Pihos. He is best, with Guiseppe, perhaps, next."

"Father—"

"Quiet, my son. I am thinking. For your first night's work, you would like to face a worthy situation, no?"

Nardio nodded agreement.

"Then, listen. Let us make the best of them your first mark!" He leaned forward, small eyes glittering. "What a mark! You would, as they say, kill both birds with one stone. Eliminate our greatest competitor and prove your worth."

Sitting alone in the darkened room, Vermi squirmed. Perhaps it was a mistake. Perhaps the boy

was not yet ready to take on such a formidable target. Pihos would be difficult to approach. Still, Vermi reasoned, the boy is good or he is not. This way we shall find out.

Nardio stood silently inside the door. To kill well, his father had taught him, he must think of his victim as nothing more than a target—nameless and without individuality. He could hear the breathing of the man who was looking out of the window on the other side of the room. This was as he had envisioned it. The small table lamp spread its yellow glow. Nardio worked his shoulders, relaxing tense muscles. Reaching inside his blouse, he withdrew the knife. Slowly, on the balls of his feet, he stepped from the shadowy area near the door and into the yellow light cast by the lamp. Crouching, he moved forward like a great jungle cat toward the figure standing in the gloom near the window.

"This is too easy," he thought. "For one so good, it is surprisingly easy. He is not alert. He does not hear." Reaching over the shoulder, Nardio clamped his palm over the victim's mouth and pulled backward, exposing the white throat.

Instantly, the man lunged backward in his attempt to break the hold on his face and mouth. But Nardio had expected this. He was well-trained.

Stepping back as the man lunged, he maintained his grip. Nardio brought the knife up and with one deft slash cut the man's throat. Dropping the knife, Nardio grabbed his victim under both arms and pulled him to a chair and across its padded back, holding him so the flailing legs and kicking heels hit no solid object.

When the heels drummed no more and the body ceased to

twitch, Nardio could allow himself to stop functioning as a machine. He released his grip and the body tumbled raglike to the floor.

With sadness Nardio looked down at his father's body. "Next to Vermi, Pihos is best," he thought. "I have eliminated my most dangerous competitor."

"That is the way Vermi would have it. No sentiment. The best man first."



No Offense Intended

Mrs. Charles A. Sears, Atlanta, Ga., told police she had trouble getting her car started. A strange man walking by offered to help her. She got out of the car. He climbed in, started the motor and drove away.

Man Bites Cop

Dallas, Tex. police are bitten more by people than by dogs. Last year nine officers were bitten by persons they arrested. One day's time from duty was lost. Only three officers, however, were bitten by dogs, and no time was lost.

Getaway in Style

The young bandit who robbed a loan company office of \$170 in Jacksonville, Fla., obviously needed the money for high living. He fled in a flashy convertible in which two dogs and a blonde were waiting.

'Fraidy Cat

A burglar in St. Paul, Minn. broke into the Knapton Tire Company building and noticed a skunk sleeping on a pile of gunnysacks. He fled. Company officials told police that the skunk was a pet that had been deodorized.

Where was Paul Mundy? Marcia was sure she knew. Her husband also was sure...

The Lovers

BY
JOHN
GODEY



SHE SAT quietly in the dusk, in the armchair, and regarded the ten-foot man and his girl-friend, a giantess with a cascade of hair that flowed down over her bare shoulders like a furious waterfall. In the dim half-light of the studio, the lovers reached for each other passionately, arms outstretched, frustrated by an unconquerable distance of twelve inches.

She heard an airplane overhead.

Without relinquishing her hold on the sledge hammer she tilted her head back and looked up through the skylight until the plane passed beyond the frame of sloping glass. Then she lowered her head, and with sudden decision got up and started toward the figures, drag-

ging the heavy hammer behind her.

She circled around to the rear of the man, with a nervous sob that rose above the sound of the hammer bumping across the wood floor, white and gritty with hardened plaster. She mounted the pedestal and stood just behind the looming figure.

Through some trick of the light she imagined she could see the rigid neck muscles cringe in awareness in the instant before she brought the sledge hammer crashing down squarely across his shoulders. She stepped back from the falling plaster. The shoulder and arm had come away, and there was a ragged cleft running diagonally down the muscular back. She laid the hammer down, got off the pedestal, and switched on the overhead light. The air was powdery with motes of pulverized plaster. She went to the window and pushed the casement outward. The autumn night came softly into the room.

She started back toward the figures. The man's left arm, intact, was still outstretched, yearning for his lover in ludicrous heroism. Slowly, holding her breath in, she walked across the room and climbed the pedestal again. She picked up the hammer, braced her feet wide apart, and swung laterally, as though the hammer were a baseball bat. When the dust cleared away she could see that most of the torso had crumbled,

leaving only the powerful legs and a remnant of the hips and buttocks.

She looked across at the figure of the girl, aspiring with unshaken faithfulness to the embrace of her shattered lover. In molding her, Carl had made one breast considerably larger than the other—in the interest of realism, he had said, since there was a disparity in most women's breasts—and looked at directly she had a slightly lopsided appearance.

"Give him up, honey," she said without amusement. "He isn't worth it."

Wearied by her exertion, she went back to the armchair and dropped heavily into it, knowing she would remain there until Carl came.

She heard his steps mounting the stairs, but when the door opened she still did not move. He stopped just inside the studio. She could almost feel the shock that went through him, that sent him reeling back as though he had walked into a wall. He must have stood there, hardly moving, for a full minute. Then he lit a cigarette, looking at her over the flare of the match. "Why? *Why*, Marcia?"

She was unexpectedly serene, as though the strength that had enabled her to demolish the figure had somehow renewed itself. Her voice was steady and matter-of-fact.

She said, "I thought you had killed Paul Mundy and put his

body in the statue."

He equalled her calm. "That's ridiculous."

"I realize that now." She looked up at him curiously. "Do you have any idea of what I've been living through this past week?"

He said, "I hadn't noticed anything," and then, as if in apology, "you know how preoccupied I get when I'm working hard." A wreath of smoke hid his face for a moment. "If something was bothering you, why didn't you tell me about it?"

"It was too late for that."

"Too late?" His eyes narrowed. "What do you mean—too late?"

"I'm not sure." Her eyes wandered to the demolished figure on the pedestal. "Anyway, it was too late to tell you that there wasn't anything between Paul and me. Absolutely nothing."

His face was expressionless. He puffed rapidly at his cigarette and said, "So you did that." He jerked his head in the direction of the sculpture.

She said, "What about Paul?"

He repeated, with an edge of impatience, "What *about* Paul?"

"He hasn't been around or phoned for almost a week—"

He said quickly, interrupting, "You miss him?"

"—since Sunday night, when you fought with him..."

She had been in bed, reading, when the sounds began, the violent thumping and scuffling on the

floor of the studio, which was just over the bedroom. She had run up the stairs, apprehensive, but the sounds had stopped by the time she got there. She knocked, and after a moment Carl opened up. He was breathing hard but smiling, and he told her that Paul had been helping him move some heavy bronzes. He stood fully in the doorway, cutting off her view of the room. He told her to go back to bed and she obeyed him. She had lain there sleeplessly, listening for the sound of Paul's footsteps on the stairs. But she hadn't heard him come down. And Carl had begun to work on the new statutes that night.

She said, "He was supposed to have come over to take me to a gallery on Monday. He didn't show up. I phoned him and there was no answer. Finally, yesterday, I went around to where he lives. The superintendent hadn't seen him since Sunday. He thought he might have gone out of town."

"It sounds like a reasonable explanation to me. He probably has gone out of town."

She stood up suddenly and faced him. "What are you going to do now?"

He turned to the statue and said thoughtfully, "Make him over again. The legs can probably be salvaged..."

"I don't mean the statue. I mean me. Us."

"Why, send you off to the coun-

try for a couple of weeks rest, I suppose. You obviously need it."

"Yes," she said slowly, "I obviously need it. And you forgive me for breaking up your statue?"

"What else can I do?"

"I'm not sure I'd be as forgiving in your place."

He said lightly, "Then maybe it's a good thing it wasn't the other way around."

His head was tilted toward the skylight, watching a smoke-ring spiral slowly upward from the end of the cigarette. It struck her that he was over-casual, and for some reason that should have been important to her. But it wasn't.

"Let's not talk about it anymore now," he said, lowering his eyes. "You're all mixed up."

His gaze was on her, fixed and hard, but she scarcely heard what he was saying. Her head was pounding, and she wanted only to remove herself, to lock the door of her bedroom, to blot out the image of that shattered man and his forlornly heroic lover.

It was a strange vacation. For the first two days she stayed inside the rented cabin, reading, cooking her meals, doing unnecessary cleaning chores. Anything to keep busy to prevent herself from thinking about Paul Mundy's disappearance.

She ventured outside on the third day, and after that took long regular walks through the piney Maine woods. Once she walked further

than usual, and came to the shore. She stood on a high promontory, looking down over a spill of glacial rock, down to where the surf pounded and the spray leaped. But the sea disturbed her with its wildness, and thereafter she stayed in the cloistered forests, where it was easier to shut out unwelcome thought.

Carl came up to join her for the week end, after which they would go back to the city together.

On his arrival, he kissed her cheek and told her she looked well and asked her if she had been swimming in the impossibly cold waters of Maine. And all the time she was trying to frame a question about Paul, phrase it so that it would not rub Carl the wrong way.

"What's the matter, dear?" Carl was asking. "You've suddenly become abstracted. Surely my arrival—"

"Oh it's nothing. It's nothing. I was just wondering about Paul."

"Paul?"

"I mean, if—if you've heard from him."

"My dear." Carl laughed, his laughter forced, pompous. "Why in the world should I have heard from Paul?"

"You haven't seen him? He hasn't come to the studio?"

"No," he said with monumental calmness. And his answer was like a challenge, a dare, a taunt.

Marcia could not continue to question him after that. She knew

when she was licked. But all that day her thoughts kept going over that scene in the studio after she had smashed the statue. She had the feeling that there was something she should know or remember about it that was eluding her.

That night as they were sitting before the fire, she was still trying to remember. She was staring into the flames and Carl was reading.

"Marcia, you are a strange little mouse."

It took her a moment to realize that Carl had spoken. His book was in his lap and his head was raised. Even without the reflected light of the fire, his smile would have had a sinister aspect.

She rose. "I'll get to bed now," she said. "Since we're making an early start."

She went into the bedroom and lay down, but she didn't sleep. Instead, she lay tossing, prodding her memory.

After awhile he came in, undressed and got into bed with her. She pretended she was asleep.

In the morning, as she was packing, what she had been seeking struck her with the sudden blinding glare of a revelation.

Carl had come up behind her. "Marcia, pay a little attention to what you're doing," he said and lifted a soiled shirt out of one bag and threw it into the other. "What's the matter with you? You're getting things all mixed up, confused, Marcia."

She stiffened, and almost exclaimed aloud. Then, thankful that her back was to him, she nodded, holding herself tightly, rigidly.

He said, "What's wrong?"

She forced herself to answer calmly, steeling herself. "Nothing. I'm all right." Her voice quavered, but she didn't seem to notice. He shrugged and went out of the room, and at last she let out her pent-up breath.

Yes, she thought, she had been mixed up. But she wasn't any longer. She was suddenly certain that he'd hidden Paul's body in the woman part of the statue. She hadn't smashed it...perhaps for no other reason than a woman's hesitancy to smash her own image.

They arrived home at dusk. Carl parked the car in the narrow Village street, and then carried the bags upstairs. He set them down on the bed.

"Shall we go out and get some dinner?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I'm too tired to eat." She had to get to the studio and find out. And then, trying to keep her voice casual, she said, "Why don't you go out by yourself?"

He looked at her for a long time in the darkening room. It was with an effort that she kept her eyes level with his, that she prevented them from looking at the ceiling and the invisible studio above it.

"No," he said amicably, "not

on your first night home. We could take beer and sandwiches up to the studio."

She hoped the surprise she felt did not show in her face. Frequently she had taken snacks up to him at lunch-time or dinner when he was working. The view was excellent through the wide windows and occasionally she had joined him.

He had turned to the refrigerator and was getting things out of it.

It didn't take her long, though she tried very hard not to seem to be hurrying.

They went up. The door was ajar. Carl pressed his shoulder against it, swinging it wide open.

Even before she moved through

the door, she saw that both figures of the statue had been demolished. She went past Carl, moving towards the base of the statue and the few shards that remained intact and upright like huge pointed teeth.

"One was worthless without the other," he was saying. She heard the beer gurgle into the copper mug. "I'll build them anew one day. It was a good idea, don't you think?"

She nodded, helplessly.

Yes, it had been a very good idea, she admitted silently.

She walked over to the bay window, set the sandwiches down. They ate. His eyes were laughing at her.



Just What He Wanted

If a thief in Springfield, O. ever uses his loot, he'll be quickly caught. He stole a suitcase from the car of the Rev. Gerald Fisher. The suitcase contained large wooden discs used by women of the Ubangi tribe in Africa to stretch their lips from four to eight inches. The minister told police he had been displaying the discs during lectures on mission work.

Armed Rob

Brooke County authorities at Wellsburg, W. Va. have been searching for a pay telephone thief who loses no time attempting to pick the locks on coin boxes. He shoots the boxes open with a rifle.

READ THE BIG FOUR...

MANHUNT, *America's best-selling crime-fiction magazine.*

MANTRAP, *Manhunt's new, big, lusty brother. Try it!*

VERDICT, *Detective stories by renown mystery writers.*

MURDER! *The new hard-hitting magazine in this field.*

These four magazines are published by the same company, edited by the same editors. More manuscripts cross the desks of the publishers and editors of MANHUNT, MANTRAP, VERDICT and MURDER! than any competitor. We not only have a larger selection of manuscripts, but we pay more to get the best.

MANHUNT is the first and foremost magazine of its kind. MANTRAP, VERDICT and MURDER! are its new brothers. We hope you will enjoy reading all four of our magazines.

LOOK FOR THEM AT YOUR NEWSSTAND TODAY!



They didn't want the killer. They wanted — anybody. An average guy named Jim Cooper would do.

Night of Crisis

HE SPENT three hours going through the picture files before he tapped one of the photographs and said, "This is it. This is the guy, all right."

The detective took the photo, turned it over. "Arn Cowley," he said. "Three-time loser."

The assistant D. A. said, "I

BY HARRY WHITTINGTON

thought Cowley was in the pen. Last time I heard of him he was in the pen."

"They parole them, Tom," the detective said. "They parole them even faster than we send them back up there." He turned and stared at Jim. "You ever know Cowley before?"

Jim caught his breath, hating the way the detective looked at him. "I told you I never had. If I'd known him why would I need to spend all this time going through the files?"

"Why don't you let me ask the questions?" the detective said. "We'll get through quicker that way. We'll save a lot of time."

Jim looked up, met the detective's gaze, held it.

"Where do you work, Cooper?" the assistant D. A. said.

"At Dodge Tobacco Wholesale. I'm a salesman."

"How old are you, Cooper?"

"Twenty-nine. What's the point in all this? Why do you treat me like I'm the criminal. I came to you people. I—"

"You married, Cooper?"

"Yes. I'm married. I have a child. I'm buying my house. It's a G. I. loan. I'm paying for my car. It's a Plymouth and almost two years old. But then I'm still paying for my child and he's almost two years old, too."

"Pretty deep in debt, aren't you, Cooper?"

Jim moved up on the edge of

the chair. He felt a muscle work in his jaw. He told himself it wouldn't buy him anything to let them tee him off.

"Nothing I can't handle," he said. Anger made his voice quaver. He took a deep breath trying to calm himself. "What's the point in all this?"

"We don't know," the assistant D. A. said. With a pencil, he made short backward strokes across a pad. "I'm just kicking this around for what it's worth."

"How long you known Arn Cowley, Cooper?" The detective leaned forward, bracing himself against the desk.

Jim Cooper turned in the chair as though the detective had struck him. This cop was big, six-three anyway, with prematurely grey hair chopped in a crew cut, a thick-featured stupid face.

Jim started up from the chair, face white. His hands gripped the chair until his fingers ached. He caught himself, sank back, shook his head.

He sat back in the chair, all the way back. He reached into his pocket for a cigarette. There was only one left in the pack. He shook it out, placed it between his lips, held his lighter to it. His hands shook.

"You want to run through it again?" the assistant D. A. said.

"All right. I was in this bar. I stopped in for a beer on my way home. There was only this man at

the bar. This Arn Cowley—"

"How did you know it was Cowley?" the detective said.

"I didn't. Not then. You just told me his name. You remember? I went into the men's room. I was in there maybe two or three minutes. When I opened the door to come out, I saw Dutch—that's the fellow owns this bar—had his hands up. When Dutch saw me, he started to say something, maybe yell at me, I don't know. This man—I didn't know his name—turned to look toward me and Dutch jumped him. He turned back around, fired at Dutch point-blank. I stood there and he turned around again. I saw he was going to take a shot at me so I ducked back into the men's room. This guy fired anyhow. There was a lock on the door, and I threw it. All I could think was, I'd seen him rob Dutch and shoot him. I was sure he wasn't going to let me live. There was a window in the room, but it was one of those long narrow things like they have in men's johns. No chance to get out of it. I waited in there, but the guy must have been afraid the sound of the two shots would bring people. He ran by the door of the men's room. He fired once through the door facing and then ran out the alley."

"And what did you do?"

"Just what I've already told you three times I did. I came out, went in the pay booth and called you

people. I spent a lousy dime doing it. For the first time in my life I regret it."

"You've just begun to regret it," the detective said. "Wait until we're through with you."

Jim stood up now. He held his hands clenched at his sides. He couldn't understand this. He had seen Dutch Obermeyer shot and killed. He had gotten a look at the man who shot Dutch, and had then taken a shot at him. He had called the police, come down here to find the killer in the files if he could, and ever since he had walked into this office these two men had treated him as though he were the criminal.

"No wonder nobody wants to cooperate with you people," he said. "No wonder you can't get witnesses. I've told you the truth."

The detective said, "Look, friend. Thirteen years. I been in this thirteen years. Seen it all. Your gimmick leaves me cold. You went in this caper with Cowley. You checked the men's room. Cowley got anxious. You get yourself trapped in the joint when he went out shooting and so you try to play the honest citizen. I'm not buying."

Jim stared at the flat stupid features of the detective. He tried to find some human understanding in the man's face. There was none. He turned slowly, looked at the assistant D.A.

Tom Donnelly was a little better.

He was a stout man with short stubby hands and harried eyes. He looked as though he didn't know what to believe, as though he'd found out it wasn't smart to believe anything.

"That's the way it happened," Jim said.

"It's not going to be easy proving it happened that way," Tom said. "You've already admitted you're over your head in debt—"

"I never admitted anything. I told you of my own free will that I owed some money. Doesn't everybody? Don't you?"

"Maybe he does," the detective said. "Only difference is, he didn't witness no robbery-killing — and live to tell about it. And you did."

"God," Cooper whispered, feeling the helplessness crawling through him. "If I'd gotten killed, you'd have believed me?"

"If you'd gotten scratched," the detective said.

"He shot at me."

"That's what you told us."

"Lay off, Hank," Tom said. "Any way you look at it, Mr. Cooper, it looks like you're in trouble."

Jim sat down because his legs would no longer support him.

"Now what are you talking about?" he asked.

Tom Donnelly scratched some more marks on the pad. He wrinkled his nose as though he smelled something disagreeable. He said, "You want to tell him about it,

Dackrich?"

The detective nodded. "Sure. Why not? We're going to have to arrest you, Cooper."

"Arrest me? Why?" Jim didn't bother looking at the detective. He stared, eyes wide, at Donnelly.

Hank Dackrich answered him. "As a material witness. As a protective move."

"For your protection," Donnelly said.

Jim swallowed the sickness that had boiled up in his throat. He moved his head, staring at them. "My protection?"

Dackrich shrugged. "Suppose you're telling the truth, Cooper. And we let you go. Don't you think that guy Cowley is out there right now somewhere, thinking about you? You saw him kill Obermeyer. You're the only one who did. You're the one man who can put him in the electric chair. How long can he afford to let you live?"

Jim didn't move.

"He'll find you," Dackrich's voice pounded at him. "He'll follow you home. No, Cooper, whether you're lying to us or not, there's just one safe place for you. That's in jail, until we can pick up Cowley."

"I haven't done anything. You can't arrest me."

Tom Donnelly drew some more marks, pushed the pad from him. He spread his stubby fingers and stared at the backs of them.

"You love your wife, Cooper? Your baby?"

Jim scrubbed his hand across his face, trying to obliterate the nightmare. "Yes. Yes. What has this got to do with them?"

"Suppose Cowley finds out you identified him?" Dackrich said. "We can't keep that out of the papers. Suppose Cowley decided he could stop you through your wife and kid?"

Jim stood up. "I'm going home," he said.

"Sit down," Dackrich told him.

"You go to hell. You arrest me and I'll sue. I swear I will. False arrest."

"We can hold you twenty-four hours, fella, and not even book you."

Jim stared about the room, the rows of brown backed law books, the leather-covered chairs, and back to the flat face of Dackrich.

"You arrest me," he said. His voice was hoarse. "You arrest me, and if anything happens to my wife—or my baby, so help me God, I'll kill you."

Dackrich just looked at him. Nothing moved him in anyway any more. He had heard everything, seen everything. All the edges were dulled, all the meaning gone.

"What'll that get you?" he said.

Jim stared at him. "Why don't you ask yourself what it will get you? They're all I've got. I did one wrong thing. I called you people when I should have walked out of there and kept my mouth shut. If

anything happens to my wife—or my baby—you won't be able to hide well enough. There aren't enough cops to stand between us. Because when I—"

"You want to change your story?" Donnelly said.

"No. Why should I? I've told you the truth. I'm going home. Arrest me, and anything that happens is on you." He stood there, waiting, looking at them.

Donnelly stood up behind his desk. His ruddy face was taut. He looked from Jim to Dackrich and back again. "I don't like to be threatened, Cooper, not at all."

Jim didn't speak. He picked up his hat, held it in his hand. Donnelly glanced again at Dackrich.

The detective shrugged. "Let him go. He's got no use for cops. We can watch him. He can't go anywhere. And when Cowley crawls out from under his rock to kill him, we can nab Cowley. If we don't get him in time—why that'll be tough."

They stood there looking at Jim. He placed his hat on his head and walked to the door. He opened it and stepped outside.

He walked down the steps, getting colder with apprehension by the minute. It was late. He should have telephoned Mary from the bar. Instead of playing honest citizen, he should have called Mary and told her not to worry.

He walked out of the police station. Something nagged at him, a

chill moved to the nape of his neck.

He felt as though somebody were watching him. He looked both ways along the sidewalk. The street was deserted. A few cars lined the curb, but appeared empty.

He remembered he had ridden from Dutch's bar down to the police station in Dackrich's cruiser. He recalled suddenly the icy way Dackrich had acted from the first. He hadn't noticed then, too upset about the death, too busy trying to help them find the killer.

They didn't want the killer. They wanted somebody who couldn't prove his innocence. Anybody. Take a young average guy named Jim Cooper and call him guilty.

He wanted to run. He kept walking until he got to the corner. He got into a cab and gave the address of Dutch's Bar.

It was far out on Park. When they got there, a crowd had gathered outside Dutch's Bar. The door was closed, but people were staring, talking.

Jim walked through them, went along the walk to his car. He wondered if Arn Cowley would be watching this car? Why should he? Cowley didn't know him or his car.

He got in, fumbled the key into the switch. He had to press three times to get the engine going. He drove away from the curb, anxious to be out of this neighborhood.

It was less than three blocks to

his small five-room cottage. It sat back in a grass plotted yard. One light burned in the living room. Mary would be wearing a mad because he was so late. He didn't care. Let her scold. He'd be thankful just to get inside that house and lock the door.

He drove the car into the garage, pulled down the door. He walked down the drive, stared along the street. It was quiet, a slight wind in the elms, lights in all the windows.

The paper was in the yard. He scowled, thinking this was odd. He picked up the paper, went to the front door. He opened the door, called, "Mary."

There was no answer. His voice died in the empty house. He felt the impact of panic, sharp and strong.

"Mary."

He slammed the front door behind him. He strode into the front room. The TV set was pale and lifeless. The playpen was set in the middle of the room, toys strewn outside it, the way Skip liked them.

He went into the kitchen, telling himself to calm down. The stove was cold. There was a kettle on one burner, no other sign that Mary had started supper.

He walked into the bedroom, trying to search back through his harried mind. Had Mary planned to spend the day away from home? He could not remember her men-

tioning it, but maybe she had.

The nursery looked pretty messy, as though she had not had time to straighten it. Their bedroom was in good shape. It looked chilled, as though nobody had even been in it for an hour.

He wanted to sit down, he wanted to fall down, but knew he had to keep moving. He could not surrender either to panic or to the fear that was slowly paralyzing him.

He walked through the house again, searching for a note. There was none. At the telephone, he dialed Mary's mother. "Mrs. Brazey?" he said. "Is Mary still there? Was I supposed to drop by and pick her up?"

"Mary isn't here, Jim."

"Hasn't she been at your place?"

"No. She hasn't phoned all day. You sure she was supposed to be here?"

"Oh. No." He swallowed, forcing his voice to remain flat. "I remember now. She was spending the day with Joanie. Sorry to worry you."

"Have you been drinking, Jim?"

"Yeah. Had a couple. Just a little fuzzy. Forgive me?" He hung up quickly.

He dialed Joan Fortson and Don answered. He asked if they had seen Mary, knowing they hadn't. Don said no, sounding pretty stuffy about a wife's unexplained absence at 11 P.M.

Jim replaced the receiver, sat down on a straight chair. He stared

at the playpen, at the toys. Why not face it? He had stopped in Dutch's at a little after five. It was now after eleven. That gave Arn Cowley five hours.

Could Cowley have seen him in the bar before? Was it a fact that thieves cased a place pretty thoroughly before they held it up? Had Dutch yelled his name, just before Cowley shot him? How could Cowley have found out where Jim Cooper lived? It was crazy to think he could have. It didn't make sense. Yet, what did make sense? The way the cops had treated him, how much sense had that made?

Five hours. That gave Mary time to build a real mad, take the baby and—and—What? Go to a movie? Skip wouldn't sit still for that. Go to a neighbor? Mary wouldn't. When she got angry, she didn't want to make small talk. Besides, he couldn't run around asking if the neighbors had seen his wife.

What could he do? He had to do something. He suddenly wished he had seen just some of the things that Dackrich had seen in his thirteen years as a cop. Dackrich would know what to do. Dackrich had a callous where his soul should be, but Dackrich wouldn't sit helpless, sweating and paralyzed like this.

He picked up the telephone, dialed police headquarters. He asked for Sergeant Dackrich, and after a moment he recognized the expressionless voice. "Dackrich speaking."

"This is Jim Cooper, Sergeant.

My wife — and baby — they're not here."

Nothing surprised Dackrich. "All right, fella. You sit right there. You ready to play it smart now and let us handle it, we'll see what we can do?"

"I've got to find my wife."

"You've got to keep your shirt on. You want to get her killed, you fool around with this thing." The thud in his ear meant Dackrich had slammed down the receiver.

Jim felt tears sting his eyes. He held the receiver a moment, staring at it. Then he replaced it on its cradle.

Before he could lift his hand, the bell shrilled. The sound jarred him and he trembled.

He told himself it was Mary. She was all right; she had called to tell him she was all right.

He lifted the receiver. "Hello."

There was a pause. He heard the vibrant hum across the wires. Panic flooded through him. His voice cracked. "Hello. Hello."

"Cooper? Jim Cooper?"

"Yes. This is Jim Cooper. Who is this? What do you want?"

"Cooper. This is a friend of yours. I got to have a word with you. I ain't got much time. So you want to listen?"

"What is it?"

"Cooper. I got your wife and kid with me. Now if they mean anything to you, you'll be real cagey, and do like I say."

"All right."

"Don't go to the police, Cooper. I'm telling you. Don't."

Cooper choked back the sob. He did not speak.

"Tomorrow morning's paper comes out, and there is nothing in it about you identifying me, good. Fine. You just forget you were in that bar, and everything is all right. Your wife, your kid, they'll be back home okay. But—cross me—and I'll send them back to you, Cooper — a little bit at a time. Now you got that? Don't think I'm kidding you. I'm a three-time loser, Cooper, and what ever I do now won't change what the law will do to me. Your wife's a cute little dish, Cooper, when she stops crying, she is. So you play it cagey for her and your kid. Don't try to be no hero. You leave that to the cops."

Cooper could not speak.

"Cooper. You there?"

"I'm here."

"All right. One last thing. You better pray them cops don't come looking for me, Cooper. Because if they do, I'll know you been to 'em. They might get me, but when they do, I'm going to be alone."

Jim pressed his fist against his throat. He wanted to speak. He had to ask if Mary was all right, if Skip was. There was a click in his ear and the line went dead.

He sat there with the receiver in his fist. He did not replace it.

He heard a car come into the drive, its tires screaming. He stood up, and then realized he was still

holding the receiver. He dropped it in its cradle and walked toward the front door.

When he opened it, Dackrich and another plainclothes detective stood there. Dackrich had his thumb out, ready to jamb the bell button.

"Come in," Jim said. He did not recognize his own voice.

The two men came into the house. The smaller detective weighed over two hundred, was under medium height, and there was a scar under his right eye. He kept his hat on.

Dackrich said, "Heard from your wife yet?"

Jim shook his head. He looked from Dackrich to the fat detective. "No. But there's something I've got to tell you."

"Okay," Dackrich said. He was watching Jim closely. He sat down on the edge of the divan, a big man, his elbows on his knees. "Sit down, Grant. Go ahead, Cooper."

Jim stood in the center of the room. He stared at the toys beside the playpen. The two men sat on the edge of the divan, watching him. He scrubbed the back of his hand across his mouth. He heard the drip of a faucet from the kitchen.

"About that story," he said, speaking slowly, his throat aching, "that I told you about the bar—about what happened."

"Yeah? What about it?"

"Well, I lied to you."

Jim watched Dackrich's face. The

detective's eyes narrowed slightly, that was the only change in his expression.

"I was in on the job," Jim said. "Like you and the assistant D.A. thought, I got in debt. I thought I could go in on a job like that, and get enough money to—pay off some of it."

Dackrich's mouth twisted. "Go on."

"I didn't shoot Dutch. But like you said, I went in the men's room to be sure there was nobody else in there. And I lied about something else, too—"

"Did you?"

"Yes. It wasn't Arn Cowley. I—just happened to pick him out."

"Pretty good picking. He's got a record a yard long on bar and grocer jobs like this one."

Jim's voice got urgent, full of panic. "I can't help it. I just picked him out. It just happened."

"Why'd you pick him?"

"What difference does it make? You already said I was in on it, and I just pulled this story trying to get away with it. And—that's right. We—planned it that way—"

"You and Cowley?"

"No. I never heard of him. This—guy I met in the bar. I was to go to the police station, identify some punk, and you people would look for him, and that would take the heat off my—my friend—and I'd get paid off and that would end it."

Dackrich stood up suddenly. His

expression did not alter. He stepped forward, grabbed Jim's lapels, twisting. "Listen to me, Cooper. What kind of fool do you think I am? Don't you think I know what happened? You came home, your wife was gone, you called me, and before I got here, Cowley called you, warning you off. He found out where you lived, came here and lured your wife out on some lie about you being in trouble. Now he's scaring you into calling off the hunt. It won't work. Cowley killed a man. We're going to get him."

"It's my wife," Jim said. He grabbed Dackrich's hand, thrust it down. "He'll kill my wife and my baby."

"Not if we find him in time."

"But he told me, if the morning paper has the story that I've been to you, he'll kill my wife and kid. You've got to stop that story. You've got to call it off. Just until he lets my wife go. Then you can get him."

Dackrich checked his watch, shook his head. "It's too late, Cooper. We can't stop the papers, most of them are probably folded by now and ready for delivery. There's a pick-up out on Cowley. We've got to find him before that paper comes out."

"He'll kill them."

"All right. You've got to stop lying to us, and start trying to help. We've got a slim chance to save your wife, but not unless you start playing right along with us."

Jim nodded. "I'll do anything.

Only for God's sake don't — don't let him hurt them."

Dackrich shook his head. "It's a big town, Cooper. We got maybe five hours before those papers come out. He's out there somewhere. We'll do what we can."

Jim caught Dackrich's arm. "But he warned me. If you — try to take him—he'll know I identified him—he'll kill them. He knows he's a three-time loser, with one murder already."

Dackrich's mouth twisted. "I told you, we'd handle it, Cooper. Now you better make up your mind to let us handle it."

Dackrich jerked his head toward Grant and the fat man got to his feet. They walked toward the door.

Jim ran after them. "Where are you going?"

"We can't stay here and hold your head, Cooper. We got a killer to find. Now here's one thing. You hear from Cowley, or anybody, you get in touch with headquarters. And fast."

Jim nodded. He saw Dackrich nod at Grant, not knowing what that nod meant, not caring, too sick to care.

He watched them leave. After a moment he heard the car back down the drive. He felt alone and helpless. The world was black and empty and full of terror.

He closed the door, went back into the front room. He could not sit down. He prowled through the house, hearing the drip of the

kitchen faucet, the tick of the bedroom clock. A car passed on the street. The telephone rang.

He sprang at the phone. His hands trembled so badly he had difficulty grabbing it up. "Hello. Hello."

There was the waiting again, the tension, the killer letting his nerves draw fine.

"What do you want?" Jim said.

"Just called to tell you good-bye, Cooper. For your wife and kid. I told you to stay away from them cops. You wouldn't listen —"

"How —?" Jim stopped, biting down hard on his underlip. He glanced at his watch, his heart slugging. No newspapers were on the streets yet, wouldn't be for hours. How could Cowley know the cops had been here?

Jim's hands trembled. There were just two ways. Cowley knew the cops were looking for him. Or Cowley had seen Dackrich and Grant come into the yard, and seen them leave.

Sweat stood like cold marbles on his forehead. His lips were dry. He licked his tongue across them. If Cowley had seen them leave, then that meant he was somewhere near where he could watch.

"I told you not to play hero, Cooper."

"Those weren't cops," Jim said. He held his breath, feeling his face muscles grow rigid. "They were friends of mine. They dropped in."

"Don't lie, Cowley. Cops I can

smell a mile. They were cops."

For a moment Jim felt his heart stop, then it hammered crazily against his ribs.

Cowley's voice raised. "Just wanted to tell you, Cooper, you can't play smart with me. Now it's too late for you to do anything." The receiver was slammed down, hard.

Jim replaced the receiver. He mopped his hand across his forehead. Arn Cowley was somewhere in this neighborhood. He had to be. It made sense. It was the first thing in this nightmarish day that did.

He stood there, trying to know what to do. He had to call Dackrich. Dackrich was tough and callous, but he was a cop and knew what to do. But what could he do? Call in his police officers and let them search the neighborhood? Cowley would not let Mary and Skip live through that.

If he tried to find them alone, and failed...

He doused that thought from his mind. If Arn Cowley were in this neighborhood, that meant he was holed up in a house where he could watch this place. What made better sense? Where was the last place anybody would look for Arn Cowley? In this quiet residential neighborhood.

He glanced at the telephone, thinking he had to call Dackrich.

He stared at it, and there was the answer. Joan and Don Fortson. The odd way Don had talked over

the phone. Don hadn't been stuffy. Don had been scared. Deep in his guts, he'd been scared.

Jim went into his bedroom. He got the Luger from his souvenir drawer. There were no shells for it. Once he'd had shells, but Mary had been afraid with Skip toddling around. She'd said that either the gun went or the shells.

He left the light burning in the bedroom.

He walked into the kitchen with the Luger at his side. He started out the back door, turned and closed the door between the front of the house and the kitchen.

He stepped out into the night. He walked slowly around the side of the house, stood staring at Don Fortson's place at an angle across the street.

He heard a sudden obscure noise in the darkness. He stopped, frozen, waiting. There was no movement. He told himself it was a cat or the wind in a hedge.

Most of the houses were dark now, people in bed or watching the late TV movies. There were lights in Don's house. The only odd note about it was the way the Venetian blinds were tightly drawn in the lighted windows.

He stepped back into the shadows. In one of those darkened rooms, Arn Cowley sat with a gun in his fist, watching this street, this house.

He went out into the alley, and then, putting the Luger in his

pocket, he ran to the corner. He did not know how little time he had, only that if there were the sound of a gun from Don Fortson's, his world would end.

He reached the alley behind the Fortson house and then walked along it, holding his breath, his hand clenching the Luger.

He walked across the back yard. There was a light in the kitchen. He moved close, but could not see in because the blind was closed.

He looked around, trying to be sure of what he was about to do. At the rear corner of the house, adjoining the back porch, there was a darkened window.

He went up the porch steps, listened a moment at the back door. There was silence, as though breathing were suspended inside the house.

Quietly he moved to the darkened window. From his pocket he took a pen knife, sliced the screen above the hook. He discarded his shoes. Cat-like, he let himself in. He must think well, and fast, when the time came. Urgency, necessity made him shrewd.

He slipped across the floor of the room, listened at the door that led to Don's front room. There was a heavy silence in there, the silence of people. He had to know exactly where Cowley was before he could make his move. Spot Cowley. Then fling the door open, throw the gun at him simultaneous with the charge. If Cowley shot him—well,

all of it should take enough time for Don to be able to jump in. It might work. It had to. There was nothing else.

He lay down but could not see into the room through the bottom of the transom. He would have to risk opening the door, ever so slightly. There was no other way.

Gun ready in his right hand, Jim reached up with his left and slowly—very slowly—turned the knob. He heard the baby rattle bounce on the other side and knew Cowley had placed it lightly on the door-knob as a warning signal.

He stopped breathing; panic coursed through him. He didn't mind dying, even foolishly, if it would save the others. But to die without making their lives safe—to cause their death—

He heard someone gritting an order in a low tone. Footsteps came across to Jim. He felt the sweat running down his forehead.

"It's me, Mrs. Cooper," he heard his wife's voice say as she opened the door. She stood there silhouetted by the light from the living room. Past her ankles he could see no one.

Then she saw him, and his name escaped her lips, "Jim—no!"

Even in so desperate a situation, he felt like an ass lying there on the floor, powerless.

"Come out, smart guy," the gritty voice ordered. "And don't try nothin' funny. I'm holding your kid right in front of me. If you've got a gun or anything else toss it

out here, or so help me I'll wipe out the room."

He tossed the gun out, rose slowly.

"Come in here!" Cowley ordered. "Hands on your head. And no tricks."

He went in with Mary, silently cursing himself that Cowley should have out-thought him.

"Keep those hands on your head," Cowley told him, jabbing the gun hard into his ribs. "I'll tell you when to put them down, smart guy." Cowley's left hand patted Jim in a quick, expert frisking operation.

"That's all then," he said. "This." He looked at the Luger and laughed. "An empty gun. Turn around, smart guy."

Jim turned and Cowley cracked the Luger across his face. The room spun and wheeled on a red pin. Jim crumpled to his knees. He felt the blood running out of his torn cheek.

He pressed his hands against his face, trying to make the room stop spinning. He heard Mary moan, "Oh," as though the pain were hers. That was the only sound.

Still on his knees, Jim raised his head. He felt a line of blood ooze along his jaw and his neck but did not wipe it away.

"So now you know how I feel about smart guys," Cowley said. "Now you won't be smart no more."

Jim looked at Mary. Her face was bloodless and her eyes red-rimmed, but her jaw was set now as though

nobody could ever make her cry again. She held the baby, which Cowley had returned to her, against her shoulder and kept her gaze fixed on Cowley. Her face showed her sick hatred.

Joan Fortson was sitting in a big chair under a reading lamp. Her face muscles were rigid, and she pushed herself back into the chair as though she wanted to sink into it, become part of it. Don sat on the edge of the divan. He stared at the floor. There was a dark welt across his forehead. His eyes were dead, and the life was gone out of him. The way he sat said whatever move he had made, he was not going to make again.

"Get up," Cowley ordered Jim. "Sit in a chair where I can watch you. Keep your mouth shut."

Cowley looked at the Luger again, mouth twisting. He dropped it in his packet. "Had to be a hero, eh, Cooper? Had to go to the cops."

Jim licked his tongue across his lips. He looked at Mary a moment, moved his gaze back to Cowley. Cowley was scowling, deep in thought.

"I went to the cops," Jim said. "You can't stay here. But you can still get away."

"Shut up. I told you to keep your mouth shut."

"There's a car out there in the garage," Jim said. "You can get away. You won't gain anything by staying here. Not now. Soon the cops'll come to this sneighborhood

because they know you would be looking for me. Then you won't get away."

Cowley stared at him. "Yeah." He thought this over. His mind was going over all the angles. Watching Cowley, Jim felt even more helpless. You'd have to be trained, somebody like Dackrich, to know even some of the angles Cowley was considering.

"You don't think I'm going to let you live to put the finger on me in court?" Cowley said.

Jim swallowed. "They've already got my sworn statement. You kill me maybe it won't be heard. You kill all of us, all those shots—they'd be heard. You'd have no chance."

Cowley thought that over. "Maybe you've come up with a good idea, smart boy," he said at last. "Right now, I don't see nothing wrong with it. Give me whatever money you got, Cooper." He glanced toward Don. "Same for you."

Don moved like a robot. He removed his wallet from his pocket, tossed it at Cowley's feet.

Cowley jerked his head toward Jim. Jim tossed his wallet beside Don's. Cowley smiled, knelt and picked up the two wallets. He removed the bills, dropped the wallets. He thumbled through the money. "You two boys ain't exactly big money men, are you?" he said, his voice bitter. He stepped toward Don. "On your feet."

Don stood up. Jim tensed, wait-

ing for Cowley to turn his back. Cowley laughed, as though reading Jim's thoughts. He turned so he could watch both of them. "You. Let's go out the back way. You back your car out, turn it around, back in so its headed out. Leave the door open and the motor running. Then you come back in here."

Jim held his breath, hoping Don would see this was a chance to get help.

The baby whimpered. Cowley jerked his head around. "I told you to keep that brat quiet."

Mary held the baby tighter, whispering to it.

Cowley spoke to Joan. "Okay, blondie, you come over here and stand right in front of me. We're going to be here watching you, Don. Only blondie ain't going to like it with this gun against her head."

Jim stared at the gun pressed against Joan's head.

Don said, "I'm going to do what you tell me. You don't have to threaten her with that gun."

"Sure, I don't. But I'm going to. Because I don't ever take no chances. This way you'll hurry."

Don nodded. He stumbled, going down the steps. Jim sat on the edge of the chair, hearing the car start, hearing it go down the drive and turn around in the street. After a moment, Don backed it into the garage.

Jim tried to think what Cowley would do next. Cowley had to get

away, and the quieter he went, the better. Jim felt numb. He knew he could never outthink Cowley.

Don came back in. He did not look at any of them.

Cowley removed the gun from Joan's head. She sagged against the door jamb, her mouth quivering.

Cowley moved his gaze around the room. He strode across, took the baby from Mary's arms. She cried out, one stark sound of agony.

Cowley moved toward the door. "You better get in touch with the cops, Cooper. They try to stop me, you got a dead kid."

Cowley turned and backed toward the kitchen door. He watched Jim, as he kept the gun fixed on him. Jim did not take his gaze from the baby as he walked after Cowley, taking slow, long steps.

Cowley's mouth worked. "You stay where you are, Cooper. Don't make me shoot you. Don't make me shoot the kid."

"Put down my baby."

Cowley moved to the door, went through it. Jim kept walking forward, knowing it was an empty threat.

Swiftly, Cowley backed the short distance to where Don had parked the car. Watching Don and the others who were behind Don, the gun ready, he slid the baby across the seat, slid under the wheel.

Jim tensed for a quick spring forward, feeling maybe he could risk it now. He heard the baby wail. Then he held himself back,

even held his expression rigid as he saw Dackrich rising from the rear floor of Don's car and with a single sharp motion crack his gun hard against the back of Cowley's head. Cowley sagged forward onto the steering wheel.

Jim felt overwhelmingly tired, weak. As he walked around to get the baby, knowing Dackrich had done what he was trained to do, without flashy heroics but by plain common-sense police shadowing, he still felt a trace of hatred for the way Dackrich had treated him.

Jim lifted the baby and it stopped crying. Mary came to him as Dackrich's partner came from out of the

nearby hedge. Without asking, Jim knew they had heard him talk with Cowley before Cowley had taken him inside.

Mary pressed hard against him. He felt a sudden sense of release. He handed the baby over to her. The whole thing had been a nightmare, and it was over.

Dackrich seemed to read his thoughts. Dackrich's voice remained flat. "Cops. Eh, fella?"

Jim met his gaze, did not speak.

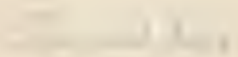
Dackrich shrugged. A bitter amusement flickered in his eyes. "We do our best, Cooper. Sometimes we're wrong. Why don't you look at it that way?"



Conscience Cases

Ephraim Brock, a father of nine children, died of a heart attack after running almost a mile to a telephone to report that his car had been stolen from his farm home near Gaylord, Mich. The thief, who apparently read of the death in the newspapers, returned the car the following night.

And in Denver, Colo., burglars broke into an auto wash garage. They ignored four jars filled with coins beside displays of peanuts and cookies that were marked "Honor System." But they forced open a nearby cigarette vending machine and took an undetermined amount of change.



Tom Collins, a police sergeant at Ferndale, Mich., is a teetotaler. So is Jerry, his wife.

Body in the Rain

BY JOHN S. HILL

*He was on his side in the
mud, his eyes starin' at nothin'.
He was a God damn mess.*



IT WAS RAININ' like hell and I cursed the day I got elected Sheriff of Thompson county. The rain smeared itself on the windshield and I wished to God that people would get themselves killed in decent hours and in decent weather. What was worse, old Solomon Greever lived in the north-west end of the county and gettin' there meant pushin' the Ford over muddy roads and up hills. But a job

is a job and a killin' is a killin', so I went.

It was Solomon Greever who was dead. His son Jeremiah had phoned us. Solomon was a tall, thin old coot who wasn't no good. He used to go 'round quotin' Bible passages all the time and gettin' drunk and raisin' hell in general. Kinda tough on Jerry, people always thought, to grow up with no ma and an old man like Solomon for a pa. Fact is,

when Jerry started pitchin' it was all the town folks could do to get Solomon to let the boy play ball. Fletcher Riley finally solved it by promisin' Solomon a jug of moonshine every time he hauled the boy in to play. Win or lose, Solomon got a jug and after that it wasn't no trouble gettin' Jerry to pitch.

Then long about the end of the season old Solomon wanted money plus a jug to let the boy pitch and that was when Riley and the rest of the folks drew the line. Old Solomon didn't like that, and we heard that he and his boy argued the hell out of it and Jerry yelled that he'd run off to pitch when his old man said he couldn't. But that week Jerry stuck his hand in the corn picker. Got stuck so bad his old man had to whack it off to get the boy free. He stayed on the farm with Solomon.

It was about two in the mornin' when I bounced to a stop in the yard and I saw that the headlights spotlighted the run-down shack. I shut off the engine and that made the rain sound all the harder as it banged on the roof of the car. I turned off the lights, yanked my hat down, made sure my raincoat was buttoned, and got out into the rain. The ground was muddy and I cursed it while I stomped my way to the porch. I got under the roof and was about to holler for Jeremiah when I saw a light. It was Jeremiah carryin' a lantern. He stepped onto the porch and put the

lantern down. Its light showed me that he was muddy as hell.

"Sorry to get you out in this kinda weather, Mr. Sullivan," he said. Jeremiah Greever was a soft-spoken kid of seventeen, tall and lanky and had the looks of a pitcher. You know, loose like and all. That is, he had the looks 'cept for his hand.

"Long as I'm here," I said, "I might as well get down to business." I stomped mud off my shoes and looked up at Jeremiah. The lantern light made funny shadows run across his face. He looked almost creepy. "Sarah, at the 'phone office, rang me up and said you'd called her from Skeeter's." Old man Skeeter lived down the road a mile or so from the Greever shack. "Sarah said Solomon was dead."

Jerry nodded. "I told her to tell you." He jerked his long, skinny head toward the downhill slope. "Pappy's out there. I come back and waited with 'im till you got here."

"Out where?"

"Behind the barn. He's lyin' in the rain. 'Course, he's dead."

I grunted. Jerry—nobody called him Jeremiah 'cept his old man—didn't seem too shook up about it. But then he always was a solemn sort. Even when he was on the ball field. I 'member how he'd stand on the mound just as solemn as a judge and would throw that damned ball so hard the batter never seen it. Jerry'd go a pretty

fair ways, we all thought. Some said clear to the top.

Too bad, but he took it okay.

"Wantta go see 'im?" asked Jerry, speaking real soft.

"S'pose so." I pulled up my collar. "God damn rain. Now, how'n the hell did it happen? Sarah told me you said he was killed."

"He was."

"How do you know, Jerry?"

He looked down at the muddy porch floor and I thought he sighed before he said, "'Cause I done it."

It took me a couple of minutes to let it soak in. All of a sudden I wished my gun wasn't in my belt under the coat. Then I saw that Jerry wasn't goin' to be no trouble and I forgot about it. I just stared at him and I must have looked like I was wonderin' because he started talkin' again.

"Pappy was drunk and I got mad an' we had a go-round. I hit 'im with a crowbar and busted his arm and hauled him down there for the rest of it."

I finished starin' at Jerry.

"I s'pose you wantta see 'im now?" he said, real soft-like.

"That's what I'm paid for," I muttered.

Jerry picked up the lantern in his left hand. "I ain't gonna give you no trouble, Mr. Sullivan. I'll show you Pappy and then you can do what you like."

I nodded and, what's more, I believed him. We headed down the slope toward the barn. The rain

hammered at us and the ground seemed to get muddier.

"You say you fought in the shack?"

"Yeah," he said, speakin' louder on account of the rain. "Pappy got drunk again and started quotin' Scripture again. I just couldn't take it no more. He used to yell it at me when he got drunk. Enough goes just so far. Even the pigs got tired of hearin' it. They'd squeal like mad. I felt like doin' the same."

"You hit 'im with a crowbar?"

"Yeah. It's in the house by the door."

"And dragged 'im out, didn't you say?"

"Yeah. Finished it down here."

I pictured him towin' his old man along behind 'im, broken arm dangle an' Solomon screamin'.

What the hell for? I wondered. Why drag him down here?

The lantern light showed only the ground 'round us and we stomped through the mud and the rain and the dark until I felt the ground level out. All of a sudden I saw a pair of feet, and we stopped.

"That's Pappy," Jerry said.

I stared at old Solomon lyin' in the mud. He was on his side, stuck into the mud, one arm caught under him—the broken one I guessed because of how it twisted. His mouth was wide open and his eyes starin' at nothin'. He was a God damn mess. The rain ham-

mered at 'im like it wanted to push 'im under the ground.

"What'dya think?" Jerry asked.

I stared at 'im. "God damn me for a coon hound if you ain't crazy! Good God, boy, if you wanted to kill 'im, you mighta done it back at the shack. You're nuts! Draggin' a man way down here just to kill 'im!"

"Had a reason," he murmured. Jerry sort of smiled and flapped his right sleeve toward me. He was soaked clean through — soaked enough for the shirt sleeve to stick around the stump on his arm and show he didn't have no right hand. "That's my reason," Jerry said. "'Member when I lost my pitchin' hand?"

"Yeah."

"Wasn't no corn pickin' machine. We was here one night an' Pappy asked me if I was really gonna run off an' pitch, an' I was fool enough to say I was. He started shoutin' the Bible at me. You know, 'bout honorin' my ma and pa. He was drunk, too. We got in a scrap an'—well, he hit me with something in the back of the head when I stomped off. It knocked me groggy. You 'member how I said he was strong? He start pullin' me and said he was gonna fix me so I couldn't pitch no more. I was near knocked out but I 'member him pullin' me down that slope, down to here." His voice dropped to a whisper. "The choppin' block's down here. The big one."

I heard myself mutter, "Jesus."

"He kept hitting at me and I was so weak from his hittin' me that I couldn't do no more'n groan. He put my hand on that block an' he picked up the ax an'—he cut my hand off."

I wanted to say a couple of dozen things right then, mostly about old Solomon goin' to hell, but all I got out was, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"'Cause I wanted to get back at 'im myself. Pappy was always tellin' me the Book said that vengeance belonged to the Lord. I didn't want nobody else doin' any vengeance but me. So I played along an' Pappy said he was sorry an' I promised to keep it quiet an' stick to the story 'bout the corn machine. An' Pappy kept quotin' that line 'bout vengeance bein' the Lord's. Only I figured vengeance couldn't wait. Tonight Pappy got drunk again an' I told 'im what I thought." Jerry shrugged his shoulders. The lantern light made him look like a ghost, almost.

"He said I wanted to kill 'im. Don't know why he didn't guess sooner. Anyway, I grabbed the crowbar an' when he came at me I swung it. If I hadn't, he'd of killed me, Mr. Sullivan. Anyway, his broke arm slowed 'im down an' I wrassled 'im out here. One arm each, Mr. Sullivan, an' I won." His voice held a trace of pride.

I was almost afraid to ask it, but I did. "What'd you do?"

Jerry lifted the lantern. The light fell over the chopping block as Jerry put his foot on the old man's side and pushed 'im over. The dead man's arm came out from under him. It was not only broken, there was no hand attached to the end of it.

I walked around and looked at the other side of the chopping block. A hand lay in the mud—

four fingers and a thumb and a palm and a hunk of wrist lyin' in the mud. The lantern light bobbed when Jerry moved and the ax, stuck in the choppin' block, threw a lean shadow over the hand.

I turned away, sick.

"Ready to go?" he asked softly.

I nodded, and we left the old man, bled to death, lyin' in the rain.



A Desperate Husband

Police in Grand Rapids, Mich. quickly investigated when they received a purse snatching report from a downtown department store. They found that the "thief" was the complainant's husband. The husband explained that he took his wife's purse to stop her "wild buying spree."

Alias Required

A woman recently convicted of swindling in Dallas, Tex. used an alias. Police said she had a good reason for doing so. The woman, Mrs. Janice R. Swindle, received a three year prison term.

Bread Thief

Continued thefts of bread from early morning delivery to a grocery in Gainesville, Fla., resulted in a police watch. The thief was caught. He was a bird dog named Headlight. Moreover, he was owned by Lou Hindery, the county jailer. Headlight was sentenced to be locked up every night.

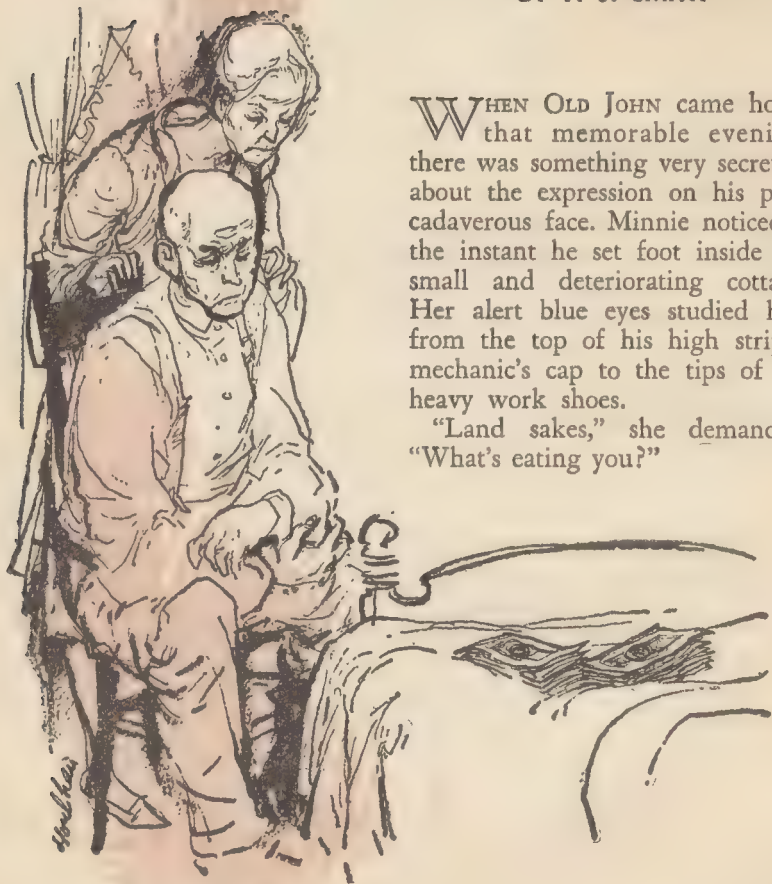
Honest Violator

In Marshalltown, Iowa, Louis Richardson was picked up as a suspect in an assault and battery case. He told police that blood on his clothing came from a pheasant he had shot. Laboratory tests proved Richardson was telling the truth. He was then sentenced to 30 days in jail for shooting a pheasant out of season.

Dangerous Money

*"Finders keepers," they said.
And then their trouble started.*

BY F. J. SMITH



WHEN OLD JOHN came home that memorable evening, there was something very secretive about the expression on his pale, cadaverous face. Minnie noticed it the instant he set foot inside the small and deteriorating cottage. Her alert blue eyes studied him from the top of his high striped mechanic's cap to the tips of his heavy work shoes.

"Land sakes," she demanded. "What's eating you?"

"They ain't nothing eating me."

"A woman don't live with no man twenty-six years without learning something," said Minnie. "What is it? Is there something wrong at the Plant?"

"They ain't nothing wrong nowhere," replied John walking past her towards the kitchen.

He moved with a shuffling gait, his egg-shaped, bald head thrust forward on a thin, corded neck.

From the ice-box he removed a single can of beer and punched holes in the top. Then he sat at the kitchen table and drank the beer with a loud, slushing sound and his Adam's apple rose and fell prominently in his narrow neck.

"By God," he remarked at length, and his eyes shifted to take in the severe little woman who had followed him into the kitchen and seated herself opposite him, "that hits the spot. She's been a hot one today."

He took another swallow. Then his hand moved to the hip pocket of faded denims to explore the outline of an object inside. He had wanted to keep her guessing a while longer; to keep her in suspense; to worry her now that her curiosity was aroused. But the thing was so big and so important, he couldn't hold it back another minute.

With a quick gesture, he dug into his pocket, pulled out the object, and tossed it in the middle of the table.

"There," he said. "Take a look at that and see how it suits that old gizzard of yours."

Minnie's eyes opened wide. "A wallet!"

"Well, don't sit there staring at it. Pick it up and open it. I'll grant you'll see something that'll make them eyes of yours pop out."

Minnie's fingers crept cautiously towards the expensive pig-skin wallet. They touched it experimentally, as though it were a live thing that might snap back, and then boldly closed around it and spread it apart.

Her dentures clicked and her breath rushed in sharply. "Land sakes!"

"Well, count 'em."

Minnie's thumb flicked across the crisp new bills and her lips moved. "Why, there's thirty-two one hundred dollar bills in here," she declared. "It don't seem possible that they could all fit in such a small place."

John showed large horse-teeth in a smile. "That's because they're new. Them bills lay together better'n peas in a pod."

"They're sure pretty and nice. Where in the world did you get them?"

"Where do you suppose I got 'em?" said John disagreeably. "It ain't no bonus from that lousy Processing Plant. I found 'em on the way home from work."

Minnie hated to ask the next question. She was almost afraid of

the answer. "What are we going to do with them?"

John leaned forward and a cunning look crept into his faded eyes. "What do *you* think we oughta do? You tell me."

For an instant Minnie's mind conjured a pleasant vision of curtains and table cloths, of bright cotton house dresses and bed slippers, and one of those fancy can-opening gadgets that screwed to the wall.

"Land sakes," she sighed, carefully evading the issue. "Just think of it. Thirty-two hundred dollars. Why, I ain't never seen that much money at one time."

"And you ain't likely to again," John assured her. "There's the equal of two, three years pay right there in that wallet."

"I wonder who it belongs to."

"It says on the driver's license. A fella named Crukshank. Crukshank," he repeated, rolling it around on the end of his tongue. "Sounds like one of them vacation fellas out on the Point. License says he's from Rhode Island. I once heard about that Rhode Island, and it's a pretty fancy place, too. You can bet that Crukshank fella ain't working for no ninety cents an hour like I am."

"You think maybe there might be some kind of reward?" Minnie ventured. "There oughta be a good reward for all that money."

John laughed contemptuously. "How much you suppose a fella like Crukshank's gonna pay?

Maybe fifteen, twenty dollars."

"Seems like he oughta give a good deal more'n that. You think we should keep it?"

"I ain't quite made up my mind yet. I gotta give her a little more thought." He extended his hand. "Give her here so's I can put her away in a safe place."

Minnie held back. "I know a good place. I'll put it away."

"Damn it, woman," thundered John. "I said give her here. And don't give me no arguments."

After he had finished his supper, John left the house. He climbed into an ancient Ford truck and rumbled a quarter of a mile along a dirt road to a run-down grocery store. He purchased two fresh cans of cold beer and the afternoon paper.

When he returned home, his wife was drying dishes. Without a word, he stored one of the cans in the ice-box and punched holes in the other. Then he sat down and spread the paper on the table and began turning the pages. He stopped at the Classified page and his eyes searched the print.

"There she is!" he cried suddenly, jabbing the tip of a hard yellow thumbnail at the paper. "Listen to this. 'Lost: Pig-skin wallet containing large sum of money. Finder please return to Jason Crukshank, 15 Hollister Drive, Point Sunrise. Reward.'" He looked up. "What do you think of that?"

"It don't say how much reward,"

said Minnie disappointedly.

"Course it don't. This Crukshank fella's no fool. He knows if he puts down what he figgers on paying, nobody's gonna return that damn wallet."

"It's awful the way some people are so stingy," said Minnie. "Some-one like this Mr. Crukshanks don't need all that money no more than a cat needs two tails. After all," she ended indignantly, "we found it, and we oughta have a right to keep it. Finders-keepers."

"What do you mean *we* found it? I'm the one that found it."

"Well, it don't make no difference who dit it. It belongs to both of us, a course. You know something?" she added wistfully. "The other day when I was in town I seen some of the nicest dresses in Goldblum's window for only \$2.98. They was real pretty."

"By God," growled John, "don't you go getting no big, bright ideas in that fool head of yours. Just you try walking in there with a one hundred dollar bill and first thing you know they'll have you down the Station House." He shook his finger menacingly. "You better keep that big trap of yours shut. Maybe you don't know it, but if we don't give that money back, it's gonna be just like we stole it."

"Well, in that case there ain't much sense in keeping it, is there? If you can't spend money, what good is it?"

"Spend. Spend. That's all you

got in that fool head of yours. You let me take care of things. When the time comes, I'll take myself a little trip to New Orleans. A big city ain't like these little towns. Why, a man wouldn't have one bit of trouble getting rid of every one of them bills in a place like New Orleans. And no questions asked." He showed teeth again. "It's a good thing one of us has got some brains."

Minnie waited for that day to come. For more than a week she waited uncomplainingly, even though no further mention was made of the money. Where John had hidden it, she had no idea. For being neither a very resourceful nor imaginative woman, it had never occurred to her to carry the search beyond the dresser drawers and one old straw suitcase that reposed on a closet shelf.

She had, however, taken note of the gradual change that had come over her husband. With every passing day, he seemed to grow more sullen, secretive and short-tempered. His nightly consumption of beer increased, along with the thick, black coffee he sloshed down every evening before retiring. Sometimes, too, when he was not aware that she was watching him she could see his lips moving, while a strange, crafty expression shaded his eyes.

Minnie was worried. Not only about her husband's recent peculiarities, but about the money. There were things she needed: things well

beyond the purchasing power of John's limited income.

On the other hand, John, too, had his own personal worries. He had given little consideration to the buying power of the thirty-two hundred dollars. His principal concern lay in seeing the money, touching it, counting it.

To John, it was a shining symbol of security, a bulwark against future impoverishment.

By God, he reasoned, there was no telling what that fool woman would do if she got her hands on all that money. He could almost hear her shriek: "Land sakes, I need this. I need that. I need the other thing."

Leave it to her and the money would all be gone in no time at all. Money was something to be seen, appreciated, handled, admired, conserved, and finally dispensed wisely.

One evening, when she had fallen asleep at her sewing, John got up and moved quietly into the bedroom. He retrieved the wallet for the first time from its hiding place in the toe of an old boot and removed the bills, marvelling at their remarkable state of preservation, fondling the smooth, new paper between his long, calloused fingers.

With infinite care, he spread the bills out on the bed, arranging them in systematic lines like rigid, prostrate soldiers. For a long time he sat on the edge of the bed, staring at them. His eyes burned in their dark hollows. God A'mighty,

they made a beautiful sight, he thought, warmed by the fine feeling of self assurance that comes to a man of substance.

In another two years he would collect Social Security. It wouldn't be much, but the cottage belonged to him and his overhead was small and his own needs few and simple. If he were a single man, unburdened with a wife, he could live in a little world of security and comparative comfort. He could spend the money in dribbles, to provide the good things in life: beer, tobacco, an extra pair of denims, an occasional bottle of whiskey.

With proper management, the money would last for a good many years — if he were alone.

He was rearranging the bills on the bed, when Minnie came in. She had entered stealthily, so that he was completely taken by surprise.

"So that's what you're doing," she said.

"By God," exclaimed John, outraged, "I thought you was sleeping! Anyway, a man's got a right to look at his money."

"Why do you always say it's *your* money?" complained Minnie. "That money is mine just as much as it's yours. It's *our* money."

"What's the difference how I say it?"

"Well, you're not supposed to call it *your* money. I'm your wife. Half of it is mine. And now that we're at it," she went on, "when

are we going to take that trip to New Orleans? There's things I want. There ain't no point in being rich if you can't use the money."

John regarded her with something akin to horror. "The money stays right where it is," he told her, "for as long as I see fit."

"That ain't fair nohow," wailed Minnie. Impulsively, she leaned over and plucked one of the bills from the bed, destroying the arrangement. "If you ain't going to New Orleans, I am," she concluded crushing the bill in her fist.

"Put that back!" thundered John, catching hold of her wrist in a savage grip. "Drop it, damn you, or I'll twist your hand off your arm."

With a piercing cry of pain, Minnie released her treasure, and Old John quickly picked up the bill. Tenderly, like a compassionate parent, he stroked it between his fingers in an attempt to smooth out the wrinkles. But the damage was done and he appeared crushed.

"Don't ever do that again!" he yelled. "You see. You've wrinkled that bill so nobody can ever get her nice and stiff again. She's spoiled. Now git in there!" he commanded sharply. "Make yourself useful and fix us a pot of coffee!"

Whimpering and despondent, Minnie scraped into the kitchen, her long, frayed bathrobe trailing about her thin, bare ankles. As she put coffee in the battered pot and placed it on the stove to boil, her thoughts soared to the merchandise-

packed stores of New Orleans. She envisioned the loaded counters, the bright fabrics, the gay cotton house dresses, the gleaming and magnificent items of chrome and aluminum and glass.

She realized now, in a flash of frightening understanding, that her husband had no intention of spending the money. At least, not while she lived. He was saving it for himself. Hoarding it like a miser. As long as both of them lived, neither would enjoy the fruits of their windfall. The treasures of New Orleans would be forever beyond her reach.

Setting her mouth in a thin, resolute line, Minnie put a chair in front of the massive, old-fashioned kitchen cabinet. She climbed onto the seat, conscious of the mutterings that came from the bedroom, and removed a bottle from the rear part of the uppermost shelf.

The bottle was dust-coated, for it had been there a very long time, ever since she had that trouble with her back and couldn't sleep. Minnie blew at the dust and held it up to the light to study the label. *One tablet at night before retiring. Caution: Overdose may be fatal.*

The bottle was almost half-full.

Without hesitation, Minnie emptied the contents into the coffee pot and disposed of the empty bottle in a makeshift five-gallon can used for garbage.

After the coffee had boiled awhile, she sampled it, taking a

very tiny sip from a spoon. "He likes it strong," she told herself. The coffee had a faintly peculiar taste, so she added a quantity of sugar and a little more coffee and let it boil a little longer.

Then she tasted it again and nodded in approval.

"Your coffee's ready!" she called out.

John could not recall the precise moment that the idea had first started to hatch in his brain, but tonight, it had emerged complete, ready to be converted into action.

When his wife called, John gathered together the bills and replaced them in the wallet and then returned the wallet to its hiding place. On his way to the kitchen, he stopped in the cluttered parlor long enough to pick up a heavy, iron paperweight and left it in his hand.

When he arrived in the kitchen, Minnie was seated at the table with her back to him. The coffee pot stood in the center of the table, fragrant and steaming, along with one large cup, a spoon, and a glass sugar bowl.

John paused a moment, sizing up the back of his wife's head. Then raising his hand that held the paper weight, he moved forward.

He carried her limp body into the bathroom and immediately

turned on the faucet of an ancient, raised bathtub. While the tub was filling, he removed her bathrobe and cotton night gown and hung them behind the door. He then lowered her body into the tub, face down.

He had read once that more accidents happen in the bathroom than in any other part of the house.

"Try to take my money, will you?" he mumbled vindictively. "Not now you won't."

After the tub had filled sufficiently to cover the body, John turned off the water and scuttled back into the kitchen. He arranged himself at the table, poured coffee, added sugar, and stirred vigorously. He tasted the coffee first with a spoon, pulling it between his lips with a slopping sound. Then he raised the cup and finished it off.

For a moment or two he sat staring down abstractedly at the coffee pot, working his lips together. The rich, black fluid had a fine steady-ing effect that seemed to flow out from his stomach and trickle throughout his whole body in a comforting flood of warmth.

"By God," he muttered, helping himself to another cup, "I'll give the Old Woman credit. She had a way of making a decent cup of coffee."



Conversation can shorten a trip. If there's a man like Rausch aboard, it can shorten your life.



Bus to Portland

BY L. W. KING

THE MORNING headlines screamed at him. He forced himself past the newsstand into the busy restaurant of the bus terminal.

That's where you could make a mistake. Buy up papers, sweat over the details. Well, he knew the de-

tails. Etched into his brain, they were.

He sat at the end of the counter, next to a skinny woman who wore glasses and smelled to high heaven of moth balls. "Coffee and scrambled eggs," he said. "And make it

snappy. Ten minutes till my bus leaves."

"Okay, mister. Take it easy. We're used to buses leaving." The waitress was blonde, built about the same as Doreen.

Above the bustle a newscast blurted: "... Still have no clue to the fiendish murder of the fourteen-year-old baby sitter and—" The knob was turned. A brassy dance band blotted out the news.

So she was fourteen. She'd lied, telling him she was seventeen.

"I just hope they catch him and send him up." The thin woman's glasses glittered. "I just hope they do."

His hand splayed through his two-day stubble of beard. In the glass he saw himself, a dark, gaunt guy in a red plaid lumberjacket. The jacket looked worn. He'd smudged oil and dust into it last night, after ripping the Sears' tag from it.

"Suppose they never do?" he said softly. "Catch him, I mean?"

"Oh, but they will." The thin woman fixed her slaty eyes on him defiantly. "Killing an innocent child! Just like King Herod."

"King Herod?"

"In the Bible," the woman snapped. "Don't you know the word of God?"

"Not the way you do."

He turned from the woman as the waitress slapped down the platter with scrambled eggs and a plate of buttered toast. God, he hadn't

been so hungry since . . . since he'd been in the army. Maybe killing made a man hungry.

A mug of steaming coffee slopped onto the counter. He gripped it in his big-fingered hands. For an instant, the smell was enough. Then he took a sip and felt it trickle down his throat, hot and satisfying. He wolfed down the eggs and toast.

"More coffee," he demanded.

His coffee came. The first gulp burned his throat. The loud speaker blared, "Bus for Portland . . . Express for Portland, Oregon."

The thin woman put a quarter and a dime on the counter as if parting with her soul. She got down jerkily from the stool, adjusted her skimpy gray suit. He finished his coffee, then slouched to the end of the line. The thin woman was only three places ahead of him, with all her rushing. He felt an unreasoned hatred for her, wished she were in Hell.

Before he reached the person who seemed to be asking questions, his stomach lurched. What if the cops were on the lookout? But there was nothing to lead them to him. He'd never seen Doreen before last night. All he had to do was act dumb.

"Name?"

"Carl Rausch," he said, fishing awkwardly for identification.

"Just a routine check."

A routine check, hell! He knew what it was for. If only he had the

fare to Seattle, maybe then he'd be able to shake the feeling of being followed. But he could act dumb in Portland, as well as in Seattle. And to act dumb, you didn't pick up the latest paper, or listen to some breathless newscaster till you got jitters.

He moved on, thinking: Some fool will be picked up. Cops make mistakes. All the time they make mistakes.

He bumped into the thin woman, who settled across the aisle from him. Not from choice, her frosty stare assured him. He took a seat next to a rabbit looking fellow.

The bus jolted out onto the highway. Passengers settled to the four hour trip, dozing, reading, chewing, gazing out at the pines that edged the road. The bus was a world closed and remote. But out there things were happening, things meant to trap him.

He let out a long sigh. Christ, he hadn't meant to kill her. Should've scattered through the desk and dresser to make it look like burglary. She'd got him all hot and bothered. She'd as much as asked him to get into bed. So what was her big idea afterwards, threatening to call the cops, grabbing the phone . . .

"The police have ways of checking . . . Awful, isn't it?" The rabbit fellow had raised his pasty face with its round eyes from the newspaper.

"What's bothering you, Mac?"

He took a cigarette from a crumpled pack and lit it, carefully watching the blond, rabbit fellow.

"Why—why, everybody gets up in arms when a thing like this happens. You read about it?"

"No." After a long draw on the cigarette, he added, "Nothing to get excited over—unless you know something about it. Do you?"

"Me, mister? Not on your life." The blond head withdrew, turtle-like into the overcoat. "It makes me crawl."

"Why should it make you crawl?" He watched the pale face. "Why should it make you crawl?" he repeated softly.

"It just does."

"For God's sake, man, things like this happen every day. Take a city like Los Angeles or New York—"

"But this is Mayfield. I've lived in Mayfield all my life. It just doesn't seem possible. Why, I knew Doreen O'Dell."

"Who's she?"

"She's the girl—the baby sitter. The one the headlines are all about. Here. Read for yourself."

"No thanks." He let a few minutes pass before asking, "Why're you hopping off to Portland so bright and early this morning?"

"Say, you don't think—Why, I have to go. Got an appointment to take the CPA exam."

"Hope you can prove that . . ."

The rabbit fellow laughed a little, uncertainly. "But, seriously, you know the police have ways.

A hair, for instance, might have dropped on the rug. The police vacuum it up and put it under a microscope and they can come up with a man's age—approximately, that is."

"You don't say!" He glanced at the thin, pale face, now a little flushed. It was worth a try. Here was a patsy who could be worried into almost anything. "So they got a hair under a microscope, humm?"

"No. Actually, they don't seem to have anything much to go on. No witnesses. But I was just figuring, I mean sometimes the police have clues they don't print. They find things out they don't tell reporters. So's the criminal walks right into a trap, you see."

"You say you're going to take the CPA exam?"

The rabbit fellow nodded.

"I thought that was for book-keeping. You sound like a regular crime detective." He laughed and poked the fellow. Since dawn he hadn't felt so strong, so sure of himself. "Don't believe I caught your name." He put his big-fingered hand out and took the weak, clammy grasp.

"Wendell Johnson."

"Pleased to meetcha." The red lumberjacket slouched companionably. "Name's Mike Riley."

"Mr. Riley. Well. What business you in?"

"Selling," he said. Then qualified it, "Speculating . . . lumber,

mining, ore."

"Ore," Wendell Johnson giggled. "Everybody's interested in ore nowadays. Uranium, you know."

He nodded, while from the corner of his eye he saw the thin woman stiffen. A hard sister to convince. Her and her King Herod!

Wendell Johnson was opening a pack of cigarettes. "Care for one?"

"Don't mind if I do."

He smoked four of Johnson's cigarettes while extracting what information he could. Where Johnson would stay, when the exam would be held, what chance he had on the exam.

"You say you knew this girl that made all the headlines," he said at the first convenient pause. "Know her well?"

"Sure—ever since she learned to walk. Lived two doors down from her. She was a sweet kid. Really blossomed out this past year. If she'd been a little older, I wouldn't mind dating her myself. I'm twenty-two," he added, as if that explained everything.

"She have a lot of dates?"

"More than she should." The rabbit face twitched. "Her folks are the easy going kind. Put their foot down one Saturday and let things go the next. That Ben, her brother, is headed straight for reform school."

When they pulled into Portland, the sun was shining and everybody bustled with anticipation. He shook hands with Wendell John-

son, grinned at the thin woman and wished he had the money to go on to Seattle. Portland was too close, too damn close.

But with one buck, two quarters and a nickel, nothing to do but stay, until he could add to it. He gripped the case, wondering if he dared. Why not? Here it was November. Everybody had Christmas gifts to think of. And what was more natural as a gift than jewelry? Lucky he had a full stock.

It was 2:18. He was Mike Riley. He'd be in Seattle before too long. Ship out from there. Everything looked good.

By 4:35 he'd sold \$14.95 worth of jewelry. Too bad he hadn't come to Portland in the first place. That was a bum hunch, figuring hick towns could be milked. Hell, he'd have come to Portland that afternoon if he hadn't met Doreen.

She had been standing in the misting rain at a bus stop. She gave him a come-on smile with those big greenish eyes. Her skin was milky white. Her lips looked berry-stained against the milky white skin, like something he must taste, bite into.

She was easy enough to date. Told him right away she was going to baby sit, and sure, she was interested in jewelry. What girl wasn't? Told him to come around in about forty minutes. Mrs. Osterberg was sure to be gone by then. She was gone all right. The girl let him in, eager enough at first. Maybe she'd

thought he was going to give her more than those damned pearl earrings. Why had she invited him into the front bedroom anyway? If that wasn't asking for it, he didn't know what was. The baby asleep there, off in a corner. It had been a big house, warm and comfortable . . .

A lot like this house now. He stood pressing the bell of a neat white cottage. A tall girl wearing an apron opened the door. Yes, she wanted to see the jewelry. Told him to sit down and poured him a cup of coffee.

Some long hair music was coming over the radio as he opened his display case. A glittering green necklace and earrings caught the girl's fancy. She liked the bracelet, too. Put it on over her thin wrist and kept murmuring, "But I can't afford it. No, I really can't afford it."

She finally put the bracelet back with an air of triumph, as if she hadn't entirely succumbed to temptation. She handed him a fiver. The necklace and earrings came to \$8.45. She went back to rummage in her purse as the five o'clock news began.

In a hurry to get going, he wasn't aware of what the newscaster was saying at first. Then he heard: ". . . assailant must have been known to Doreen O'Dell . . ."

He stiffened. How the hell did that figure? He made himself relax. He had to act dumb.

"A pearl earring has been found. Any information leading to the mate of this earring . . ." God, till this moment he hadn't remembered. His fingers dug into his pocket. He kneaded the earring between his big fingers, crushing it against his thumb.

He didn't realize the girl had returned and switched the news off. "That's terrible what happened down in Mayfield, isn't it?" she asked.

"Hmm?" He jerked, wanting to run. Panic funneled through him.

Her eyes narrowed on him. "Just a minute. I've got something on the stove. Just you wait here."

She was too obvious. Something on the stove, hell! He eased quickly out the door, holding the case against his chest. Then he ran a block with the case banging his shins. After a right turn, he walked swiftly to the bus.

Riding along in the bus, he realized vaguely that he had gyped the girl out of her fiver. Her own damn fault, though. If he'd stopped to make the sale, she'd have turned him over to the police. Or would she? Why was it he always got so panicky? He could stay calm up to a point and then . . .

He lost himself in the downtown crowd. A persistent rain began to fall. He turned into a drug store and found a phone booth. It was 5:32 by the clock over the soda fountain.

He dialed the police, made his

voice a dead monotone. "Here's a tip on that baby-sitter murder. There's a Wendell Johnson registered at the Heathman. A neighbor of this girl's. Caught a bus from Mayfield 7:50 this morning for Portland. He's your man." He hung up on the last word.

Then he went to the lunch counter and ordered a hot beef sandwich. Never mind what that gal, whose fiver he'd run off with, reported now. The fear that had pounded in his chest eased some.

Rain pelted down, wind driven, when he stepped onto the street. He went into a double feature movie. *Dragnet* was advertised on the marquee. Smart Jack Webb—let him figure this one out. He came down the dim aisle, took a center seat. A travel feature was on, and he dozed. He awoke when a foot landed on his. The lights were up; the theatre was emptying.

The morning was cold after the rain. He put the red lumberjacket on. Still he felt cold. Cold and impatient. What was going on? For the first time he was tempted to buy a paper and pore over every line of it, just the way every fool in the cafeteria was doing.

Any new clues? Was Wendell Johnson being held? Or was it as Johnson himself had said: The police don't let everything get into print. This morning the storm claimed the headlines.

He felt the tap on his shoulder.

He slopped his coffee over, putting it down. He turned quickly.

"Rausch! Remember me?"

Of all the God-damned luck! Of all the people he'd never counted on seeing again. "Rev!" He pulled out the chair beside him. "Still wearing your collar the wrong way, I see."

Reverend Andrew Gledhill was a round little man. His thinning hair contributed to the round effect. He looked like an egg. A good egg, old Rev.

"Decided to settle here since you got out of the army?" Rev asked.

Maybe if he told Rev how it was . . . Hell, no. What was getting into him? "No," he said with quick decision. "Matter of fact, I'm shipping out tonight."

"Oh? Thought the storm had things tied up." After a long silence, Rev said, "You wouldn't be running away from something, would you, Carl?"

"Hell, what would I be running away from?"

"The same thing you were always running from—yourself."

"Still working without a couch, aren't you, Rev? Just wait till the head doctors unionize and you're gonna have to stick to the Bible."

"And you're still putting up a front, Carl. Why don't you settle down and get married to some nice girl? Or if you have, stay with her."

Same old Rev. Same old line. He picked up his case and said that he had to be going. The last he saw

of Reverend Andrew Gledhill was a troubled stare.

He was shipping out tonight he'd told Rev. If he just had a license, so he could work the downtown area. Really rake it in. But get a license for one day? Hell, no. He just had to hit a good residential section. All women were suckers for jewelry.

His eyes roved over the headlines on the news rack as he waited for the streetcar. Damn, why wasn't there anything about the baby sitter? So long as there was a screaming headline he could ignore, it was easy. But this—this not knowing was tough.

"At three I'll knock off. Maybe buy a paper. Yes, at three," he promised himself. It was now ten minutes to eleven.

The day didn't grow warmer. His feet felt numb. He let two streetcars pass in favor of one whose sign said *EDGEMONT DRIVE*. That had a nice, fancy sound. He got off in a neighborhood that was almost too fancy. Big houses, two-car garages. The first two doorbells he rang were answered by maids. Couldn't even put a foot inside.

He found when he did get to talk to the fat housewives, they bought not one necklace, but several. And no shuffling around in their purses for enough cash, either. He grinned when he sold the green necklace and earrings. Some profit! Served that suspicious dame right yesterday that she lost her five spot.

When he saw the squad car cruise by, he was standing on a porch making change for a twenty. As soon as he could, he snapped the case closed and tried to keep it out of sight. After the woman closed the door, he pretended to search through his pockets. All the while the squad car idled along. As soon as it was out of sight, he came quickly down the steps. He started up the street in the opposite direction.

He didn't let himself look back. First thing he knew the squad car was back again; now on his side of the street. He tried to keep walking at an easy pace. He had a right to be walking down the street. Hell yes!

The squad car stopped. "Hey, you!" one of the cops yelled.

He ran, ran up the drive of a red brick house. A scrappy dog bounded out to nip at his legs. He dropped the jewelry case and kicked at the dog.

"Come here, Sheba!" A redhead in plaid slacks stepped out on the back steps. "Here, Sheba!"

He grinned at the redhead, and reached for his case. "Morning, ma'am. Thanks for calling off—"

"Why'd you run?" A heavy hand seized his shoulder. He looked up into the eyes of a fat-faced cop.

"What's up? Can't a guy run from a yapping mutt ready to bite?"

"You started running before any yapping started." The hand tightened. "That your sample case?"

His knees wobbled. Damned knees that'd let a man down.

"If that's your sample case, where's your license?"

He took a deep breath of the cold, raw air. "Okay, so I haven't got a license. Okay, fine me." He glared at the cop. To keep from punching him in his pig eyes, he dug his fists deep into his pockets.

The redhead said, "I'm sorry about the dog. I don't want to cause any trouble here."

"You're not causing any trouble, lady. This guy's got it coming." The cop shoved. "Get going."

His feet moved numbly along the driveway. Inside him, his thoughts hammered away: "*They haven't got a thing on me. Not a thing. Maybe a ten dollar fine for no license, but they haven't got a thing on me. All I gotta do is act dumb.*"

He got into the squad car and sank back against the seat. Nice deal for these two fat cops, cruising around in a warm car to catch a guy on foot in the cold.

The cop who'd brought him to the car said, "So you're selling jewelry, hm-m-m?" Made it sound more like, *so you're selling dope.*

He didn't bother to answer. He took what comfort he could from the back seat. It was a lot softer than the cell they'd throw him in after booking him. Hell, what am I thinking? They've got nothing on me, no right to put me in a cell.

At the station house, he didn't have to tell himself to act dumb.

He felt dumb, going through the finger-printing and mugging.

"You pulled a fast jewelry deal on a woman out on Cedar Ridge yesterday," a cop said. "Ran off with five dollars, didn't you?"

He stared at the cops in sullen silence.

"You know anything about that baby sitter murder?"

His heart froze. "You cops know all the answers," he muttered.

"Lock him up till we get the woman from Cedar Ridge to identify him."

Petty larceny, on top of no license. Maybe a twenty-five buck fine. So what?

They herded him into a cold little room with a narrow cot. He heard the key click. He slumped down and waited. At first he dozed. Then he couldn't sleep. He began to wait.

At one point—God, he couldn't be sure of time—the rabbit fellow came in. "Yes sir, that's him."

Even the gal from Cedar Ridge Avenue came and put in her two-bits worth. "I knew it the minute I saw him. He looks like a criminal. Will I get my five dollars back? He took it. I want it back."

"You can't prove a thing . . . not a thing. You've got nothing on me." Like a record caught in a groove, he repeated this over and over. "Not a thing . . . not a thing."

"Don't forget that jewelry tag string found on the rug beside the body," a voice spoke up. "The lab said only jewelry is marked with this silky sort of string."

He closed his eyes. Jeez, a piece of string couldn't hang a guy.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, the boy appeared. A pale kid beside the wide bosomed matron. Maybe five, maybe less.

The matron said, "Now, Billy, look real close. Don't be afraid. Remember this is what we brought you up here for. Is this the man?"

"It's him," the boy said.

"You're sure?"

The boy nodded. "I saw him when I woke up. I didn't say anything because they were playing on the bed, him and Doreen, and I wanted to watch. Then Doreen started to cry. And he slapped her—real hard. And—and—and then he put his hands around her neck and choked her till she didn't cry no more. When you're dead, you can't cry no more. . . ."

Carl Rausch's head was bowed and he was grinding his fist into his forehead. She'd said baby sitting. He should have had enough sense to know that the kid she was sitting for didn't actually have to be a baby, but a kid old enough to see and hear and—*talk*. But she'd said baby sitting . . . baby sitting . . .



AH, SHUT UP already!" snapped Petey. "You're just chicken!"

Bunty bit at his lips and nervously darted his eyes sideways. Ahead of him, entering the darkened park, Petey quickened his step.

Only a handful of hot, sweating people were in the northern end of the small Manhattan park. Before the big fire, a few years ago, tenement houses had surrounded

the park and crowded the sun and the moon off the streets onto the sooted rooftops. The tenements that had not burned were still able to seal in the four-block square park. But it was at the other end of the park, with its bright lamp posts, cement checker boards and tables, and small nondescript discussion groups, where the neighborhood people sought relaxation.

There was little talking or play-



Chicken!

Bunty took out his .22 and aimed it at the man, playfully. Cra . . . a . . . ack, he laughed, imitating the sound of a shot.

BY PHIL PERLMUTTER

ing, however, on this July night. Too hot and stifling. Many people sweating at home—tried lying in bathtubs brimming with cold water, or sluggishly leaned out of windows fanning themselves with the afternoon's paper, or, those who had the patience, went to the air conditioned Metro movie house down the block and sat through the double feature they had seen the previous Saturday night.

"Whyn't you listen to my side?" persisted Bunty, as he lagged behind Petey.

"Listen, hell," said Petey. "Come on, you're slow as molasses."

Bunty's sweating face quivered resentfully. He was thirteen years old, a year younger than Petey, but slightly taller and more wiry. As he increased his pace, he limped noticeably, almost hopping on his left leg.

Suddenly, he stopped short. "Go 'head, already," he protested. "I can't keep up with you. This goddamn rifle hurts!"

"Announce it to the world, why don't you!" shouted Petey, spinning around angrily.

"Well, I can't move! Can't you see?"

Petey eyed him coldly. "All right," he said resignedly. "We'll rest behind the bushes. It's good and dark there."

Low, neglected hedges, about four feet high, lined both sides of the pathway. Behind them, about eight feet away, loomed a tall iron

fence, outside of which lay the dirty New York City payements. Across the street, stood the gray, gloomy unburned tenement houses.

Wearily the two boys flopped down on the short grass, loosening their belts and shirts. Still their clothes stuck to their hot bodies.

"Got a butt?" mumbled Petey.

"No—"

"You never have any!" taunted Petey.

Bunty indifferently rolled up the right cuff of his blue-jeans, so as to relieve the pressure of the concealed rifle against his ankle.

"Keep it covered, will ya?"

"It hurts my foot!" complained Bunty.

"You want the cops to spot you?"

Bunty silently rolled the cuff back down.

Petey turned and peered through the fence bars to the far street corner facing the park, from where they had come. People continued to drift in and out of Glotz's Candy and Stationery Store, their bare moist arms filled with cold dripping soda bottles and containers of ice cream.

"Why did you turn chicken, eh?" bitterly asked Petey.

"I didn't, I told you!"

"Then why didn't you come in when I gave you the all-clear sign? There were just a few old ladies at the counter!" Petey's voice grew angrier. "If Mikey was with me and not you, he wouldn't have dumped the deal!" Bitterly he

punched Bunty in the arm.

"Oh, yeah, but it's my rifle. And I wouldn't have given it to him! Anyway, he would have done the same as me. There were too many people outside. They knew what I looked like."

"Bull!"

"Sure, it's easy for you to say! You were inside—with the old ladies! You didn't have to pull out the rifle. I tell you we couldn't get away with it—"

Petey winced in exasperation and reproachfully shoved Bunty aside. "Ah, you're just *chicken*!"

"Yeah? What about that bus driver? He stopped right on the corner and kept staring at me and my pants! I tell you I couldn't pull out the rifle when you signalled. He was wise to something and kept sitting there with the bus—even when the light turned green!"

"Go on, *chicken*! Get out of here!"

"I swear to you, Petey, the guy was staring at me!"

"He moved later, didn't he?"

"Yeah, but—"

"No buts!—I don't want to know! You should have done what we planned. What's the good of a plan if you don't go through with it? *A plan's a plan!*" he affirmed wisely, spitting to one side for extra emphasis. "Why the hell I ever took you on, I don't know. It was a sure thing—a \$100 bucks easy. Maybe even \$200 bucks!"

Bunty lowered his eyes, eager

for the subject to change, while Petey glared anxiously at Glotz's Candy and Stationery Store.

"There's one of the old ladies coming out now. That who scared you?" laughed Petey.

Bunty was mum.

"Oh, no," continued Petey. "It's that little girlie with the ice cream pop that chickened you! You thought she was holding a stick of T. N. T.!"

Bunty swallowed, not daring to say a word.

"Or maybe it's that one-armed blonde that scared you?"

Bunty's eyes shot up in curious surprise. "Where? I didn't see her—"

"There ain't none, dope! I just wanted to see how smart you were. *You Chicken, you!*"

"Alright, you don't have to rub it in so much," flared Bunty. "You know, there's a limit to everything! If you want to go back so much, let's go! We'll stick 'em up now!"

"It's too late!" barked Petey.

Bunty sneered. "I thought you were the guy whose mother don't worry when you stay up late! It's only ten thirty—"

"Why you dope, you! I didn't mean it 'late' that way. It's a matter of *fate*! Don't you know you can't push it? It's bad luck! Anyone will tell you that! You flubbed the deal once, and there's no trying again—at least not with you!"

Bunty was unconvinced, but didn't argue the point.

Instead they both greedily stared at the store, mumbling low curses, as the hot, humid night sweltered their thin bodies. Finally Bunty restlessly crawled over to the hedges and peered through.

Some twenty yards down the concrete lane, seated on one of the wooden benches, away from the bright lamp posts, cuddled an upper teen-aged boy and girl.

"Look at that guy operate, will you?" whispered Bunty excitedly, nudging Petey's leg.

Petey jetted upright, his eyes aglow, and expectantly gazed through the hedges. "Know the guy?" he asked.

"No, never seen him before..."

"What about her?"

"Never seen her before..."

She sure is built nice, eh?" asked Petey.

"Yeah . . . but, hey, look at that guy's hand go!"

Petey grinned. "How'd you like to be him, eh?"

"Yeah, man!"

Their minds' eyes stole far ahead of the youthful kisses and caresses on the hard wooden bench.

"Why, the sonuvabitch, look at him!" glowed Bunty. "This I ain't never seen, never! Look at that hand go!"

Petey inched forward, his lips parted. "Yeah—and look at him kiss!"

"I think I'll shoot him. Boy, wouldn't he be surprised?" joked Bunty. "Just think how that

sonuvabitch would jump!"

Petey didn't reply. His tongue flipped excitedly. Finally he agreed. "That would be funny—especially if you shot him in the hand!"

Bunty playfully took out his .22 and aimed at the boy's arm. "Craacckk!" he laughed, imitating the sound of a shot. "Jeez, how that guy would jump!"

Petey mirthfully looked at Bunty. "Who you kidding? You wouldn't shoot a dead mouse! Here chicken, let me see that rifle!"

Grabbing it out of Bunty's hand, he proned himself on the short grass, and studiously aimed.

Surprised, Bunty gripped him by the shoulder. "Hey, you're not going to really shoot the guy, are you?"

"Of course not! What do you think I'm crazy, eh?" asked Petey. "He didn't do nothing to me. Listen, when I'm ready to shoot a guy it'll be for something good—something big! Not that horny punk!"

The temptation for Bunty was irresistible. "What's a matter, *you chicken?*" he laughed cynically.

Petey bolted upward and slapped him across the head. "Don't you call me 'chicken', you no-good-yellow bastard, you. I don't have to take that from you—not after what you pulled on me!"

A tear came to Bunty's eyes, as his head ached with the sting of Petey's long bony fingers. "You didn't have to hit me, you know,"

he stammered.

"Next time keep your dumb mouth shut!" And again Petey struck out with his thin but muscular arm, this time catching Bunty solidly on the shoulder.

Bunty winced in pain, but didn't dare strike back. No one hit Petey. "Well, prove me wrong!" he cried out bitterly.

Petey swung again, with both hands, but Bunty was ready and ducked backwards, out of reach.

"Sure," stubbornly persisted Bunty, "you can hit! But if you talk so much about me being 'chicken', let's see *you* shoot the guy!"

Petey laughed disparagingly, paused—as if in deep thought—and then gallantly but instantly aimed the rifle, held his breath, paused, laughed, and lowered the rifle just as abruptly as he had picked it up. He grabbed Bunty by the open shirt collar and pulled him forward. "Listen, chicken, I don't have to prove nothing *to you*! Nothing! You hear? You're the guy that has to prove himself. Remember, you're the guy who got the jitters because a couple of old ladies looked at him!"

For a minute they stared angrily at each other, Petey secure in his physical and mental superiority, while Bunty shrank back, afraid of Petey's strength and labelling him "chicken."

"Give me the rifle!" cried Bunty, breathing heavily. "I'll show you

who's chicken!"

"Sure, here!" spurred Petey.

Bunty aimed deliberately, moving the sights up from the young casanova's hand to shoulder.

"Well?" snapped Petey.

Bunty glanced sideways. Sweat dripped down his forehead. His throat felt parched.

"Well, go 'head and shoot already..."

Bunty's finger froze on the trigger.

"I knew it!" triumphed Petey. "You're chicken through and through, like I said!"

Bunty's arms relaxed and sagged. He tried to work up some saliva, but couldn't. His voice cracked. "The guy isn't bothering nobody! —You said so yourself! He's just having a good time! Why should I shoot him because you say I'm chicken? It ain't right! Anyway, I never shot anybody..."

Petey grinned triumphantly. "Yeah, I know just what you mean," he smirked, adding, "Chicken!"

"I ain't and you know it!"

"Oh, sure, I know it!" mocked Petey. "You're just sorry for the girl! You don't want to hurt her little darling boy friend!"

Bunty ridiculed back. "So what, maybe that's it?—I feel sorry for her and I don't want to see her cry!"

"Alright then, if that's all it is," gloated Petey mischievously, "*there's* an old guy for you sitting

all alone. Look at him—sprawled out on the bench like he was spitting on the stars! I dare you take a shot at him!”

Buntz turned red, vengefully seized the rifle, and quickly aimed at the man’s leg.

“Where you going to shoot him—in the head?” taunted Petey.

“Sure, where else?—right smack in his dumb head!”

“Let’s see!”

“Alright, but remember, Petey, after I shoot, you shoot!”

“What’s that now?” laughed Petey. “What are you crazy? We both can’t shoot the same guy.”

“Then you’ll shoot someone else!”

Pete kept laughing. “Why you jerk, you! The place will be swimming with cops before we find a second sucker. What do you want to do, get caught, eh?”

Buntz spoke convulsively now, as his whole body shook. “So what, if we get caught?” he flaunted. “We can always say we found the rifle and were kidding around with it. It went off by accident!”

“Yeah, right away they’ll believe you,” nodded Petey. “The cops ain’t that dumb yet. Maybe your mother will believe it. But,” he mused, “I’ll bet that accident line could be used for one shot!”

“Well, we could always say we’re juvenile psychos or something like that! You read about what that college character did to that girl—”

“What are you talking about,” interrupted Petey impatiently. “You

ain’t going to get the kind of lawyers his old man got for him! Why his family got millions! What’s your old man got?”

“I see what you mean. Maybe you’re right.”

“Anyway he’s got nothing to do with you. At least that guy wasn’t chicken! So either take your shot at the guy there or shut up!”

This time Buntz aimed and squeezed the trigger. But it wouldn’t budge. “It don’t work.” His voice rang with annoyance. “The trigger must be broke.”

Petey leaned over and peered at it closely. “You’re just dumb! Didn’t you ever fire a rifle?”

“Plenty of times.”

“Yeah, I’ll bet. That’s why you didn’t turn the safety off! Now, go ‘head!—It’ll shoot!”

“O.K., but look!” pointed Buntz. “The guy is gone!”

While they had been talking, the man had gotten up and gone.

“Whoa, wait a minute!” snapped Petey happily. “Here comes a real target!”

Through the entrance of the park, a large fat man, with baggy pants rolled above his ankles, and with a sweaty undershirt glued to his stomach, trudged into sight.

“Bah! He’s no good! He’s moving. I can’t shoot him,” complained Buntz.

“That’s all the better when he’s moving! We’ll see how good a shot you are!”

“No, it’s too hard. The other guy

was sitting still—"

"What do you want, eh? —the guy should come over and press the trigger for you?"

"O.K.," relented Bunty, firmly lifting the rifle. But suddenly the man stopped. "Now, look at that!" gasped Bunty. "I think he's going to turn around and go away—"

"No, he ain't. Take it easy. He's just wiping the stinking sweat off his bald head!"

Bunty nodded, and cautiously poked the barrel through the hedges. "You know," he whispered softly, "it's really hard shooting in the dark at a guy who's moving!"

"I know all about that! But let's see you hit him!"

Ten seconds dragged by.

"Just wait a second..."

Another twenty seconds passed.

"Come on already, shoot! What are you going to wait till baldy is right on top of you? Anyone can shoot that way!"

"Just a second more..."

The fat man loomed bigger against the bead of the rifle.

"Well, chicken, you going to shoot that gun or aren't you?"

Craacckk! The man stopped short; his hand rocketed upward; his head snapped back; he staggered; turned; and crashed face forward on the warm, dirty cement ground. The young lovers on the

nearby bench jumped up in surprise, looked about, saw the fallen body, looked about again, and hurriedly walked out of the park. Everything else was undisturbed. No one ran to the windows from the nearby tenement houses or from the southern end of the park to see what happened. The *craacckk* was just a car backfiring or some kids shooting off a fire cracker.

Petey sprang to his feet. "Jeez, you did it! You really did it!" he stammered over and over in disbelief, tugging at Bunty's arm. "We got to get out of here!"

Bunty didn't move. "Did you see that shot?" he asked proudly. "I'll bet I hit him right smack in that bald head!"

Petey tightened his grip and yanked hard. "Come on, will you? You dumb or something? We got to get out of here!" he cried. "*You killed the guy!*"

"What do you mean *I killed the guy?*"

"Didn't you see the way he fell?"

"I didn't mean to kill him."

"Doesn't matter; the cops are going to be here; and I'm getting out of here *now!*" stammered Petey, running to the iron fence.

Bunty rushed after him and laughed. "What's a matter, big shot? — you look scared! *You're not turning chicken, are you?*"



Yes! YOU GET \$15⁰⁰ WORTH OF MYSTERIES AT ONCE — FREE!

Including These Very Latest Smash Hits of

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

IMAGINE GETTING \$15 worth of new mysteries right away—FREE! Full-length hard-bound books by “champion” mystery authors. **SIX** great books in all—**TWO** of them by the “Undisputed King of Mystery Writers,” Erle Stanley Gardner! **PLUS** thrillers by Agatha Christie, Anthony Gilbert, Roy Vickers, and Victor Canning! You get **six** new books that would actually cost you a total of \$15 if you bought them, but now they're yours **FREE**.

Why do we make such a generous offer? We feel that this giant gift package will prove (far better than mere words ever could) the advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club—the only club that brings you the very latest **NEW** mysteries at one third the usual cost!

The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very “cream of the crop”—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. **ALL THESE**, and many other famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many of them are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are **ALL** newly published books. As a member, you get **THREE** of them **complete** in one handsome volume (a \$6.00 to \$7.50 value) for only \$1.89. So you get **THREE** new mysteries **FOR LESS THAN THE PRICE OF ONE!**

You Take **ONLY** The Books You Want

You do **NOT** have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's “Preview,” which will



fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need **NOT** take any specific number of books—only the ones you want. **NO** money in advance; **NO** membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest **BRAND-NEW** detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save **TWO-THIRDS** the usual cost. (3) You take **ONLY** the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean—delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for 6 FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once—**FREE**—the six complete mystery thrillers described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. Clip the valuable postcard now, and mail it at once to:



DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L. I., N. Y.

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE

SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD

50

**Walter J. Black, President
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York**

FF

Please enroll me as a member and send me **FREE**, in regular publisher's editions, the **SIX** new full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only \$1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U. S. A. only.*)

Mr. }
Mrs. }
Miss }

(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City.....

Zone No.

(if any)

State.....

**MAIL THIS
POSTCARD
NOW
FOR YOUR
SIX
FREE BOOKS**

**NO POSTAGE
NEEDED**



Free-

TO NEW MEMBERS

All Six of these Thrill-Packed Mysteries!

Including These Very Latest Smash Hits of

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

ALL
FULL LENGTH BOOKS
RETAIL PRICE
\$15.00

JUST MAIL POSTCARD TO GET THESE SIX GREAT NEW MYSTERIES **FREE**—AT ONCE!

**1 THE CASE OF THE
TERRIFIED TYPIST**

By Erle Stanley Gardner

The surprise witness Perry Mason's counting on to save his client **DISAPPEARS**. Then she turns up in the courtroom as the star witness for the D. A. — against Perry's client!

4 BURDEN OF PROOF
By Victor Canning

You're falsely convicted of murder. The only way to prove your innocence is to track down the **real** killer. But you're in a prison from which no man has ever escaped—and lived to tell about it!

**2 THE CASE OF THE
NERVOUS ACCOMPLICE**
By Erle Stanley Gardner

Mason's defending beautiful Sybil Harlan, on trial for **MURDER**. The D. A. has an open-and-shut case against her. All Perry can offer in her defense is — a pile of rusty scrap iron!

5 A QUESTION OF MURDER
By Anthony Gilbert

Detective Crook, Miss Shepherd and Dr. Lamb ignore Margaret Reeve's suspicions of **murder**. Crook, Shepherd, Lamb — should know they're leading her to the **slaughter**!

3 SO MANY STEPS TO DEATH
By Agatha Christie

Hilary Craven poses as the wife of a missing scientist to help lead British Intelligence to him. She doesn't know he's the prisoner of a mad man who collects — human brains!

6 DOUBLE IMAGE
By Roy Vickers

YOU have a "double" who has fooled your uncle, your banker, even your **wife**! Now he's going to commit a **MURDER** — and make certain that YOU hang for **HIS CRIME**!

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P. L. & R.)
Roslyn, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

**4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
ROSLYN, L. I.
NEW YORK**

**DON'T
MISS OUT
ON THIS
SENSATIONAL
OFFER!**

**MAIL
POSTCARD
AT ONCE!**

— continued on
inside cover

MANHUNT

OCTOBER, 1956